

# The Role of the Radical Left Wing in the Japanese Suffrage Movement

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For the first twenty-five years of this century, the issue of universal male suffrage occupied the attention and energy of both reformer and revolutionary in Japan. The purpose of this paper is to examine the response of the radical left wing to this issue and to suggest that this group forfeited a position of leadership in this important social and political struggle by its inability to speak with one voice.

The pre-World War I advocates of universal suffrage came, for the most part, from the incipient socialist movements, or were descendants of the popular rights (*jiyū minken*) movement of the early years of the Meiji period. The socialists based their program on the social democratic ideas of the German socialists but also were subject to strong Christian humanistic influences. The most important of the early socialist groups was probably the *Heiminsha* (The Commoners' Society). Its newspaper, the *Heimin Shinbun* ("Commoners' News"), founded in 1903, suffered a precarious existence due to its espousal of "dangerous ideas" such as universal manhood suffrage, a graduated income tax, the abolition of the peerage, and the nationalization of the railways. Its stance opposing the Russo-Japanese War made it extremely suspect by the authorities, and the newspaper was banned, for the first time, in November, 1904, when it published the Communist Manifesto.

The men who were associated with the *Heiminsha*, such as Katayama Sen, Abe Isō, Sakai Toshihiko, and Kōtoku Shūsui, can be considered as the mainstream of the Japanese socialist movement in the first years of this century. Most of these men were committed to peaceful parliamentarianism and regarded a revision of the

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nation's suffrage laws as one of their chief goals. By virtue of an Imperial Ordinance issued in 1890, suffrage had been given to males over the age of 25 who paid a land or income tax in excess of fifteen yen. The effect of this standard was to enfranchise approximately 450,000 men or about one and a half per cent of the total population. Until after the end of the first World War the only significant revision of the suffrage ordinance was a reduction of the tax qualification to ten yen.

Universal male suffrage was mentioned prominently in the platforms of the political parties formed by the *Heiminsha* group. For example, the *Shakai Minshutō* (Social Democratic Party), formed in 1901, called for universal male suffrage, but this appeal was short-lived; the party's radical program prompted police authorities to order its dissolution just three hours after it was created. The *Nippon Shakaitō* (Japan Socialist Party), created in 1906, managed to survive somewhat longer, in part by a judicious refusal to publish a declaration of its principles at the time of its organization. Within a year, however, it faced not only official disapproval but an even greater threat arising from internal dissension.

The internal threat to the unity of the socialist group came in the form of proposals for a substitution of "direct action" (*chokusetsu kōdō*) in place of parliamentary tactics to achieve political control. The direct action program at this time is usually associated with one man, Kōtoku Shūsui. Kōtoku had been active in the socialist movement since 1897, and like most of the socialists of that time he had stressed the evolutionary nature of socialism and argued for a reduction in the tax qualification in the election law. But by 1907 he had come to lose faith in parliamentary techniques, and in an article entitled "I change my ideas," he outlined his new views on universal suffrage.<sup>1</sup>

Citing the United States as an example, Kōtoku declared that, even in countries which have universal male suffrage, only the wealthy, the brazen, the shrewd politicians are elected to office. Moreover, Kōtoku argued, even assuming that the proletariat did manage to elect someone who might be expected to represent its demands, the person elected would soon become tarnished by his new surroundings and associates and would inevitably betray his trust. Here he cited the British Socialists as an example; as soon as they were elected they "lost their stamp as laborers and became arrogant."<sup>2</sup> Thus, Kōtoku argued, the Japanese must not rely upon

these ineffective tactics. "Direct action"—terrorism and the general strike—were the means he proposed as a substitute for universal suffrage, and anarchism was to be the goal.

Kōtoku introduced his newly acquired beliefs to the second annual convention of the *Nippon Shakaitō* which was held in February, 1907, and he very nearly managed to convince the organization of the wisdom of direct action and of the futility of the call for a universal suffrage movement. A draft resolution reflecting a compromise between "direct action" and parliamentary socialism had been drawn up. It included the universal suffrage movement among a list of "optional" activities recommended to its members. Kōtoku was not satisfied with this concession and demanded, in an impassioned, hour-long speech, that the party strike the reference to a universal suffrage movement from its resolution and add a clause affirming its belief in the ineffectiveness of parliamentary action. According to one observer, Kōtoku spoke "with eyes ablaze and a tongue spitting forth fire." He criticized the party's reliance on the Diet and its failure to recognize that the universal suffrage movement was only a "device of the bourgeoisie for toppling the power of the nobility and for exploiting the laboring class."<sup>3</sup> The universal suffrage movement and social reform, as techniques of the bourgeoisie, had no place in the struggle of the working class. "Direct action" was the only way—in spite of the fact that there would be many "victims," Kōtoku continued:

But were there not 400,000 victims sacrificed on behalf of the capitalists in the recent Russo-Japanese War? Compared to this figure, the number of victims that we will lose in a few weeks, a few months of direct strikes, will be insignificant.<sup>4</sup>

At the very time the convention was in progress an important event was taking place at the Ashio copper mines in Ibaragi Prefecture north of Tokyo.\* The mines there had been the scene of frequent labor incidents in the past but the riots which broke out

\* Sources are not altogether consistent with regard to the chronology of events being discussed here but I believe the following is probably correct:

February 4, 1907 Beginning of riots at the Ashio copper mines.

February 5, 1907 Appearance of Kōtoku's article, "I change my ideas" in the *Heimin Shimbun*.

February 7, 1907 Ashio mine incident reaches most critical stage.

February 17, 1907 Debate over direct action takes place at *Nippon Shakaitō* convention.

in February, 1907, were violent to an unprecedented degree in Japanese history. Over 3,600 miners and sympathizers participated in the riots which arose from dissatisfaction with working conditions and low wages. Extensive damage was done to the mine's properties by workers using dynamite. When local police were unable to cope with the situation the Army was finally called out to suppress the rioters, over 300 of whom were arrested.

The Ashio riots were convincing proof to Kōtoku of the value of direct action and he drove his point home to the convention delegates by contrasting the revolutionary vigor of the miners with the torpor of the Diet:

We have great respect for Tanaka Shōzō\* and I think that we have found it difficult getting men like him into the Diet in the past ten years or so. [But] to what effect has he shouted in the Diet for these past 20 years? Was he able to do so much as lift a finger when it came to [alleviating the situation at] the Ashio copper mines in Furukawa? The laborers at the Ashio mines have done more in three days than he did in 20 years. And, more than that, they have sent a shuddering chill into the hearts of the domineering classes. Violence has always been bad, but we have to recognize that the power of direct action for just these three days was greater than 20 years of parliamentary discussions.<sup>5</sup>

The combination of Kōtoku's persuasive address and the events at Ashio nearly gained the day for the cause of direct action. When the final vote was taken on the convention's resolution, Kōtoku's proposal for direct action received twenty-two votes, with twenty-eight votes cast for the program which included universal manhood suffrage.

The *Nippon Shakaitō* convention of 1907 is an all but forgotten moment in the annals of the proletarian movement in Japan. But it does have some significance—as a landmark—to the historian, for if the genesis of the ideological split over revolutionary methods which plagues the Japanese socialist movement to this day can be traced to one moment in time, that moment would be when the vote was taken on the Kōtoku amendment to the convention's resolution on February 17, 1907.

Kōtoku's extremism assured him of a very small, though very enthusiastic, following. It also ushered in an era of extraordinary

\* Tanaka Shōzō (1841-1915), a member of prefectural and national assemblies from 1880, was regarded as a friend of the peasant.

police surveillance and oppression of radicals. Although Kōtoku's program had been rejected by the *Nippon Shūkaijō*, the very mention of the proceedings of the conference in the *Haimin Shimbun* so alarmed the authorities that they once again ordered the newspaper's suspension. The party was also ordered dissolved, and it was not until after World War I that the Japanese socialist movement again had a party. These regressive measures tended for a while to strengthen the hand of the direct action advocates, for it was becoming evident that there were no legal avenues of critical protest left open by the government. But police oppression, which had begun to weaken the ranks of the socialists, reached a peak in the *taigyaku jiken* ("treason incident") of 1910. Kōtoku himself was executed for his part in this alleged plot to assassinate the Emperor Meiji. If the radical movement in Japan had walked with the unsure steps of an infant in the first decade, it at least had a lusty voice; after the *taigyaku jiken* even that was gone. When the movement was reborn in the first years after World War I, massive changes were taking place in Japanese society, and these changes gave the suffrage movement a popularity and an impetus it had not previously known.

Shinobu Seisaburo in his multi-volume history<sup>6</sup> of democracy in the Taishō period maintains that the "rice riots" of 1918 marked the turning point in the universal suffrage movement.\* The riots had created what amounted to a national sense of exhilaration. People had become aware, almost overnight, that they possessed the capacity to affect the society around them, to bring a government down, to challenge the power of the Army and police, to crush their economic enemies, the rice speculators and usurers. They had, in short, begun to acquire a political consciousness.

Almost immediately the universal suffrage movement began to

\* The rice riots (*kome sūdi*) stemmed from governmental failure to control the spiraling cost of rice in the inflated economy of postwar Japan. Violence first erupted when the housewives of a fishing village in Toyama Prefecture ransacked the shops of local rice merchants in August, 1918. The riots, which spread to the metropolitan centers within days, necessitated widespread use of the Army and resulted in the collapse of the Terauchi cabinet in September, 1918. The riots were largely spontaneous occurrences with little or no leadership. For a valuable discussion of their significance, see George O. Totten, "Labor and Agrarian Disputes in Japan Following World War I" in *Economic Development and Cultural Change*, IX (October 1960), pp. 187-239.

display a new character. Not only was its base of popular support now broadened, but new tactics were also utilized. The chief participants in the prewar movement had been a small group of discontented intellectuals, most of whom came from wealthy families. Most of these men were far more at home in a study group than in labor union halls. To them the universal suffrage movement had meant, more than anything else, discussion and appeals—and an endless number of formal petitions presented to the Diet. Symbolic perhaps of the change in technique between prewar and postwar years was the “postal card movement” (*hagaki undō*) which was under way by late 1918. The avalanche of postal card appeals from commoners to their representatives in the Diet brought a large segment of the population into direct contact with the suffrage movement, and while, as one commentator observed, the postal appeals had little effect on the Hara government, they lit a fire under the nationwide suffrage movement.

What then was the role of the radical left wing during this postwar period when new forces in Japanese society began to be released by the rice riots and also by the Russian Revolution? In particular, to what extent was the radical left interested in gaining control of the movement for universal suffrage? One might think that the leaders of the radical left, conscious of their lack of a broad popular following, would have seized this opportunity to mobilize popular agitation for expanded suffrage and then, after acquiring this indispensable base of popular support, move on to more revolutionary causes. Some leaders of the radical left did of course advocate this plan of action, but one of the most influential spokesmen for the radical left, Yamakawa Hitoshi,\* advocated a different strategy.

\* Yamakawa Hitoshi (1880-1958) had studied at the Christian Dōshisha (at that time a mission high school, later a university) in Kyoto. There he read about socialism and learned of the Christian concept of God. The latter concept, as he later recalled, had sown the first seeds of doubt in his mind about the nature of the Japanese state, the Imperial institution. In short, about what was called *kokufu*. He left Dōshisha as a baptized Christian at the age of 17, but soon abandoned his Christian faith in favor of socialism. By the time he was thirty he had been in and out of jails for anti-war protests during the Russo-Japanese War, for his participation in the “Red Flag Incident” in 1907, and in connection with the suppression of the *Heimin Shūinbun* where he had been employed from 1906. Biographic details are taken from “Rōnō-ha to jinmin sensen—Yamakawa Hitoshi o megutte” (“Yamakawa Hitoshi and the Rōnō Faction and the people’s front”), by Hanzawa Hiromu, in *Tenkō* (“Conversion”) (Tokyo: Heibonsha, 1962), II, 969 ff.

Yamakawa was the translator of Western works on socialism and communism into Japanese, the editor of half a dozen radical journals, including (in post-World War I years) the Communist Party's theoretical journal *Zen'ei* (Vanguard) and *Shakai Shugi Kenkyū* (Study of Socialism), the unofficial organ of left-wing socialism. The *Nihon Shakai Shugi Dōmei* (Japan Socialist League), formed in 1920, was Yamakawa's creation. He also helped organize the Communist Party in Japan, directed its course for two years, and then brought about its dissolution. He was, in short, at the very center of the radical movement in Japan at this time, and if any one person deserves to be called its spokesman, it is Yamakawa.

In February, 1922, Yamakawa expounded his views on the universal suffrage movement in an article in *Zen'ei*.<sup>7</sup> In good Marxist tradition he maintained that tactics such as the struggle for expanded suffrage could be evaluated only in terms of the present stage of development of capitalism in Japan and the direction in which it was moving. The Japanese bourgeoisie, Yamakawa maintained, was different from the European bourgeoisie in that it had not participated in any revolution. Consequently, government by feudal nobility had not been replaced by a bourgeois democracy in Japan. It had instead been replaced by a "government of bureaucratic and military cliques" (*kanryō gumbatsu no seiji*). No significant bourgeois liberalism, no political democracy had developed in Japan; far from that, it was a shrewd dictatorship that controlled the country. Japan's bourgeoisie had already moved into the reactionary and imperialist stage. "It would be the gravest mistake," he wrote, "to imagine that an age of freedom or democracy is coming to Japan. The bourgeoisie in Japan are without a doubt going to become more and more reactionary, more and more predatory, more and more on the offensive whether we have universal suffrage or not."<sup>8</sup>

Since this was so, Yamakawa argued, there was no possibility of an alliance by the proletariat with the bourgeois forces, no room for proletarian participation in any of the bourgeois programs, because such a coalition would only strengthen the hand of the bourgeoisie: "If we crowd in at the newly opened doors of [some future] Diet we will only lend a new stability to the base upon which the future capitalist rule will rest."<sup>9</sup> He pointed to a recent declaration by representatives of nine Tokyo newspapers who had announced their backing of universal suffrage. Yamakawa quotes them as saying:

The class struggle is not going to be an easy problem for Japan to solve. We do not believe that we can eradicate the problem by universal suffrage but if the proletarian classes are not given some right to expression we have no reluctance in contending that this problem is going to become worse and worse. For this reason, that is, in order to pacify class strife, we urge the realization of universal suffrage. . . .<sup>10</sup>

Here was proof for Yamakawa that the bourgeoisie intended to quiet the voice of the proletariat through the granting of universal suffrage. This was sufficient evidence to constitute the basis for an anti-universal suffrage movement led by the proletariat. "Let the party politicians whistle. We'll not dance to their tune," Yamakawa concluded.<sup>11</sup>

What Yamakawa went on to propose was not that the proletariat should merely stand aloof from the universal suffrage movement but that it should organize a counter-movement which would positively renounce enfranchisement rights. Yamakawa had in fact been advocating this for two years or more, and his February, 1922, article in *Zen'ei* was meant to clarify and justify his views on what had by this time come to be known as the *kiken undō* ("discard [voting] rights movement").

In trying to understand why Yamakawa felt that a *kiken undō* was necessary it would probably be wrong to place too much emphasis on his theoretical analysis of the nature of the Japanese bourgeoisie and the revolutionary situation in general. Not surprisingly, the language and the substance of Yamakawa's theoretical evaluations of Japanese society during this period betray his reliance upon Comintern evaluations. In any case, Yamakawa's February, 1922, evaluation was in complete harmony with the evaluation offered by Zinoviev in January, 1922, when Zinoviev addressed The Congress of the Toilers of the Far East in Moscow.\*

The most compelling reason why Yamakawa felt that the proletariat had to engage in a *kiken undō* at that time was that he believed that this movement would heighten the proletarian

\* The Congress of the Toilers of the Far East, whose sessions were held in Irkutsk and Moscow beginning in the fall of 1921, provided the first opportunity for Comintern leaders to meet with significant leaders of the Japanese proletariat and analyze the revolutionary situation in Japan. See Xenia Eudin and Robert C. North, *Soviet Russia and the East* (Stanford: University Press, 1957), pp. 153-154; 225.



consciousness of the labor unions and other left wing organizations which were just beginning to emerge. A *kiken undō* would be a dramatic means of demonstrating to Japanese radical forces of the left that their goals and tactics had nothing in common with the goals and the tactics of the bourgeois political parties and the forces associated with *minpon shugi* (democracy). The *kiken undō* was, more than anything else, Yamakawa's method of establishing the widest possible gulf, psychological and tactical, between the proletariat and the *minpon shugisha* (democrats).

Yamakawa felt that the *minpon shugisha*, men like Ozaki Yukio\* and Yoshino Sakuzō,† were merely anxious to use the energy of the laboring classes to bring about democratic reforms such as universal male suffrage, reforms which would lull the revolutionary forces into a false sense of accomplishment and well-being and set them on the dangerous road to parliamentarianism. Referring to Ozaki's efforts to organize Japanese labor so that he might have a mass audience to which he might transmit his suffrage program, Yamakawa said that, "We [Yamakawa and other radical left wing leaders] saw the danger to the infant Japanese labor union movement and sounded the alarm."<sup>12</sup> Going on, he asked rhetorically:

So, you say that there might once have been a danger—a danger that the labor union movement's vigor might be sapped by parliamentarianism—but isn't the danger gone now? Never! It is all the more present now. The gates of the Diet are blocked firmly to the laboring classes now. But what if the gates are opened. Then, without a doubt a segment of the laboring classes will elect to move ahead on the "smooth road." Moreover, this segment will probably be a surprisingly large one. . . . Labor's road ahead is today more than ever fraught with great peril. We must face up to this peril and examine our beliefs. We must strengthen the camp. We must adopt proletarian tactics.<sup>13</sup>

\* Ozaki Yukio (1858-1954), a Diet member for sixty-three years, championed the cause of free speech and resistance to the militarists and the *zaibatsu*.

† Yoshino Sakuzō (1878-1933), a professor of political history at Tokyo Imperial University, was probably the chief publicist for *minpon shugi*. His articles appeared nearly every month for years in the *Chōō Kōron* during and after World War I. He believed that democracy was fully compatible with the concept of the Emperor's sovereignty and was the solution necessary to eradicate the great political evils of the day—political corruption, governmental irresponsibility, and the growth of a powerful plutocracy. Universal suffrage, in turn, was the only way to realize—or at least perfect—democracy.

Yamakawa's resentment over the labor unions' failure to realize that they were being "used" by the *minpon shugisha* was probably inevitable considering the philosophy of the *minpon shugisha*. The foremost spokesman for *minpon shugi* was Yoshino Sakuzō. Yoshino's vigorous espousal of political reforms in the years during and after World War I was matched by—and to a great extent derived from—a fear that political and social inequalities would result in revolutionary upheaval in Japan. In discussing the need for universal suffrage in 1919, Yoshino repeatedly uses the phrase "safety valve" (*anzen-ben*) to illustrate the function of universal suffrage. It would allow the people to express their dissatisfaction and release their energy in a harmless, even beneficial, manner. Lacking such a "safety valve," the masses were a powerful and dangerous force which could wreak great havoc on society. In his 1919 work on the suffrage movement, he wrote:

It is already evident that the people are dissatisfied with the gradual extension of the suffrage and, moreover, even if they were content today, we have no reason to hope that they will remain content tomorrow. . . . Inequitable social legislation [will be regarded as] arising from limited suffrage and the people will perceive the relevance of all this to be problems of their livelihood and then . . . whatever the cost they will one day act to carry out their demands.<sup>14</sup>

The Japanese historian Shinobu has summed up Yoshino's attitude towards the proletariat by saying:

Yoshino Sakuzō rejected the idea that the people are sovereign (*jūmin shuken ron*), he rejected the idea that proletarian rights should be extended, and at the bottom of his "social cooperation" (*shakai kyōdō ron*) was a distrust of the masses. . . . He was a disciple of government by the philosophers, of government by the elite. . . . Above all else, he concentrated on the endowment of the masses with the right to political participation—but not with political power.<sup>15</sup>

For Yamakawa, mere "political participation" was not enough. And, in view of the proletariat's woeful lack of "proletarian consciousness," political participation would be not only insufficient but useless and dangerous. For this reason, to heighten "proletarian consciousness," Yamakawa called for a *kiken undō*.

It is difficult to measure how much influence Yamakawa's call for a *kiken undō* and his guidance in general exerted on the labor

union movement. There was a pronounced change in the tactics and platforms of the labor unions and federations beginning in late 1919 and becoming more pronounced in 1920 and 1921. But it is impossible to determine whether this increased revolutionary fervor stemmed from Yamakawa's guidance or from two other factors: (1) the angry reaction that set in following defeat of suffrage bills by Hara and the *Seiyūkai* politicians in the 42nd session of the Diet;\* (2) an intensification of police suppression of strikes and labor union activities which came in the wake of the postwar economic recession and especially after the stock market crash of March 15, 1920. These factors undoubtedly had the effect of making the labor unions more and more disenchanted with parliamentary and "unionistic" methods and increasingly inclined toward policies of direct action.

Whatever the reasons, such a trend did emerge. Let us take one example, the *Yūaikai* (later the *Sōdōmei*). Until 1918 we might characterize this union as conservatively oriented and solidly under the control of men like Suzuki Bunji and Kagawa Toyohiko. These men, especially Kagawa, were not without their merits as union activists, but their basic philosophy was humanitarian rather than revolutionary. The *Yūaikai* at this time supported the universal suffrage movement. By 1919 the influence of this conservative group was still strong in the Kansai (Kyoto-Osaka) area but its headquarters in Tokyo was being infiltrated by a group of radicals, many of them university students who had only recently supported universal suffrage but who now had come to believe in direct action. Their efforts to change the platform of *Sōdōmei* failed in 1919, and again in 1920, but the strength of the so-called anti-suffrage faction (*fusen-ha*) was clearly growing. In December, 1919, at a *Yūaikai*-sponsored meeting in Tokyo, the aged Suzuki Bunji was shouted down with cries of "Suzuki is not a laborer," when he attempted to address the group on the merits of suffrage.<sup>10</sup> Finally, in 1921, the

\* This is the view of Nishi Masao who maintains that the period from 1919 to early 1920 was the period of greatest mass participation in the universal suffrage movement, but that labor unions began to abandon the movement and veer towards syndicalism immediately after the rejection of universal suffrage bills by Hara and his subsequent dissolution of the Diet in February, 1922. Nishi Masao, "Saikin ni okeru kaikyū undō" ("Various class movements of recent years") in *Nihon shihon shugi hattatsu-shi hōron* ("Essays on the development of Japanese capitalism") (Tokyo: Iwanami Shoten, 1932-1935), p. 18.

Kansai branch of the *Sōdōmei* capitulated, and universal suffrage was completely dropped from the organization's program. Thus the universal suffrage movement had lost the support of a large segment of organized labor by late 1921.

<sup>2</sup> Paralleling this development was the increasing syndicalization of the labor union movement. Yamakawa had hoped to contain the syndicalist forces, to bring these "troublesome extremists" under the control of what was shortly to become the Communist Party. Therefore, in late 1920 he created the *Nihon Shakai Shugi Dōmei* (The Japan Socialist League) which was to include representatives from the entire spectrum of the proletarian movement. It was an important event because it succeeded, for a while, in bringing together the old line socialists of the prewar days with their more radical postwar counterparts, and because it was the first organizational attempt to bring the socialists and labor union leaders together. But like the *Nippon Shakaitō* before it, its early collapse in 1921 stemmed as much from internal strife brought about by anarcho-syndicalist elements as from police oppression.

In 1922, Yamakawa became increasingly concerned with the danger being posed to the radical movement by the anarcho-syndicalists. These forces, he feared, were rapidly overwhelming the labor movement in Japan. Their violent tactics and anarchistic goals were losing popular support among the proletariat and had already brought about a greatly intensified campaign of police suppression. Thus, whereas in early 1922 Yamakawa had perceived that the greatest danger to the proletarian movement lay in its lack of revolutionary fervor, by August, 1922, he had come to believe that the movement was imperiled by an excess of revolutionary fervor.

As a result, Yamakawa wrote an article for the August, 1922, issue of the *Zem'ei*. The article, "Musun kaikyū undō hōkō tenkan" ("A change of direction in the proletarian movement"),<sup>17</sup> has become a classic in the great body of Marxist polemic literature in Japan and was, at the time of its writing, an exceedingly controversial issue among left-wing ideologues in Japan.\*

\* The origins of the article are controversial to this day. The official history of the prewar communist movement maintains that it was "a propaganda piece" designed to publicize the resolutions of the Communist Party." Ichikawa Shōichū, *Nippon Kyōsantō tōshō shōshi* ("A short history of the Japan Communist Party")

The article called for a "return to the masses" (*Taishū no uchi e!*). It advocated, on the basis of a reappraisal of the stage of development of Japanese capitalism, a working class movement based upon mass support. It criticized the isolated and sectarian activities of the leaders of the radical movement. Socialism in Japan, he maintained, was ideologically "the purest in the world" prior to World War I. This was, he said, very praiseworthy, a necessary step in the creation of an elite who possessed an independent "proletarian way of thinking." But, he said, in keeping their eyes fixed on the final goal, the destruction of capitalism, the radical leaders had ignored the means to achieve that goal. Yamakawa concluded: the Japanese socialists had always been concerned with purifying the movement but the more they purified it, the further they isolated themselves from the masses. It was now necessary, he insisted, for the leadership to compromise its ideological purity and identify itself with the masses and their goals, however mundane and short-ranged those goals might be.

While Yamakawa did not specifically advocate support of the universal suffrage movement in his "return to the masses" article—perhaps he could not bring himself so suddenly to such an unrevolutionary step—the implications were clear. The large segment of the radical left which looked to Yamakawa for ideological leadership found justification in his words for support of the universal suffrage movement.

By January, 1923, Yamakawa had come to admit that his *kōen undō* may have been a mistake. The idea of a *kōen undō* had been correct "in principle," he continued to maintain, but there may have been an error "in timing."<sup>18</sup> Whether the proletariat decided

(Tokyo: Shūkō Shoin, 1946), p. 61. On the other hand, Yamakawa, in the course of a post-World War II public forum discussion on the subject "Fifty Years of Progress in the Socialist Movement in Japan," stated that he was "in the spot at the moment the very night before its publication. There had been no discussions from the Party," he said, Shinobu Seikaburo, *Taishū densetsushū shi* ("A history of Taishō democracy"), (Tokyo: Nihon Hyōronsha, 1955), pp. 666-667. (Hereafter, Shinobu, *TDS*.) Shinobu offers an interesting explanation of the "change of direction." It was a response, he maintains, to Soviet appeals to the proletarian forces in Japan to sponsor a movement which would (1) bring pressure on the Government to call off the Siberian intervention and (2) assist in famine relief in the Soviet Union. These two goals could not be carried out within the framework of a syndicalist-dominated movement. They called for a mass organization, Shinobu, *TDS*, p. 629.

to vote or to refrain from voting was not crucial. Such alternatives were merely tactics and a "choice should not be made on the basis of empty theorizing . . . but by analyzing which of two tactics could better counter the bourgeoisie in the Diet."<sup>19</sup> What was crucial, however, was the attitude of the proletariat in pursuing either a universal suffrage movement or a *kiken undō*. In defining what that attitude must be Yamakawa dwelled on the word "positive" (*tekkyoakuteki*). Thus, in a somewhat later analysis of his *kiken undō*, he wrote (in November, 1923): ". . . the proletariat must always be ready, in its future political activities, to shift from positive exercise of voting rights to positive abstention from voting."<sup>20</sup> But he hinted that he would not be issuing another call for a *kiken undō* by making it clear that:

It is an undisputable fact that positive exercise of voting rights is the ordinary means of opposition [to bourgeois forces] and that positive abstention from voting is an extraordinary means of opposition designed to cope with an extraordinary situation.<sup>21</sup>

The most convincing reason for Yamakawa's decision to abandon his *kiken undō* and "return to the masses" is provided in a deposition Yamakawa wrote for police officials fifteen years later, in 1938, when he was under arrest for engaging in illegal political activities.<sup>22</sup> By late 1922, it had become evident, he wrote, that universal suffrage would soon be realized and it would, therefore, only be a question of time before the masses began to engage in political activities such as the creation of political parties. He discussed this with young people, and found that they were all in agreement about the urgent need for the proletariat to create political parties. The proletarian movement could no longer afford to ignore the enthusiastic demands for participation in the universal suffrage movement and other parliamentary activities. "I feared that we would become isolated," he wrote. "Therefore, in order that we might not lose the masses, we would have to take it upon ourselves to organize political parties."<sup>23</sup>

In summary, it would seem that Yamakawa, up until about the middle of 1922, had endeavored to steer the Japanese proletarian forces clear of involvement in the suffrage movement—and all other parliamentary activities—because he felt that the drift of Japanese society was away from democracy and the proletariat could there-

fore expect no benefit from "entering the Diet." Far from receiving any benefit, it would lose what little sense of "proletarian consciousness" it possessed and would soon cease to pursue revolutionary goals. From about the middle of 1922 on, however, he began to perceive that revolutionary zealots were isolating the radical movement from an essential proletarian base. Moreover, on the basis of either his own analysis or that of the Comintern he had come to believe that there was hope for development of the radical movement within the framework of the institutions of bourgeois democracy. As a result, he called for a "return to the masses," for proletarian participation in the suffrage movement.

By this time, however, the passage of universal male suffrage legislation was virtually a foregone conclusion, and when final enactment came in the spring of 1925 the forces of the radical left could take little of the credit. Their vacillation and reluctance to engage in parliamentary tactics had meant that the center of the suffrage movement stayed in the hands of the *minpon shugisha* and, more particularly, the opposition "bourgeois" parties of the Diet.<sup>24</sup>

## NOTES

1. The article appeared in the *Heimin Shinbun* in February, 1907. It is discussed in Nobutake Ike, "Kōtoku: Advocate of Direct Action," *Far Eastern Quarterly*, III (May 1944), 222-236.

2. *Ibid.*, p. 233.

3. The description of Kōtoku's rhetorical style belongs to Sakai Toshihiko, quoted by Arahata Karson in his *Jidai* ("Autobiography") (Tokyo: Rinsen-sha, 1960), p. 161. Arahata was also present at the convention and presumably recorded Kōtoku's remarks.

4. *Ibid.*, pp. 161-162.

5. *Ibid.*, p. 162.

6. Shinobu Seisaburo, *Taishō demokurashii shi* ("A history of Taishō democracy") (Tokyo: Nihon Hyōronsha, 1955). Hereafter, Shinobu, *TDS*.

7. Yamakawa Hitoshi, "Futsū senkyō to minan kaikyūteki senjitsu" ("Universal suffrage and proletarian tactics"), *Ōe'ei* ("Vanguard"), I (February 1922).

8. *Ibid.*, p. 153.

9. *Ibid.*, p. 156.

10. *Ibid.*

11. *Ibid.*, p. 149.

12. *Ibid.*

13. *Ibid.*, p. 150.

14. Yoshino Sakuzō, *Futsū senkyō ron* ("Discourses on universal suffrage") (Tokyo: Bunshinsha, 1919), p. 48.

15. Shinobu, *TDS*, pp. 496-497.
16. *Ibid.*, p. 878.
17. Yamakawa Hitoshi, "Muson kaikyū undō hōkō tenkan" ("A change of direction in the proletarian movement"), *Ōsei*, II (August 1922), 16-25. Because the original article was heavily censored, my discussion of the article is based upon a less censored version as it appeared in Yamakawa Hitoshi, *Muson kaikyū no seiji undō* ("The political movements of the proletarian classes") (Tokyo: Kōsei-kaku, 1924), pp. 1-23.
18. Yamakawa Hitoshi, "'Hōkō tenkan' to sono hihan" ("A change of direction" and its criticism), dated January 1923, in Yamakawa Hitoshi, *Muson kaikyū no seiji undō*, p. 60.
19. *Ibid.*, p. 61.
20. Yamakawa Hitoshi, "Nihon ni okeru demokurashii no hattatsu to muson kaikyū no seiji undō" ("The development of Japanese democracy and the political activities of the proletarian classes"), dated November 1923 to April 1924, in Yamakawa Hitoshi, *Muson kaikyū no seiji undō*, p. 244.
21. *Ibid.*, p. 246.
22. Yamakawa Hitoshi, *Shuki* ("Memorandum"), an unpublished manuscript, dated August 1928, written at the Higashi Chūfu police station on official police stationery. It is now in the possession of the Hoover Institution, Stanford University.
23. *Ibid.*, pp. 867-869.
24. A discussion of the role of the political parties in the universal suffrage movement is contained in Peter Duus, "The Universal Manhood Suffrage Issue (1919-1925)," *Papers on Japan*, I (June 1961), published by the East Asian Research Center, Harvard University, pp. 227-266.