up to my principles. Do not speak, do not get excited, and do not be conspicuous. You must be quiet and simply stab, stick, cut, and shoot. There is no need to meet or to organize. Just sacrifice your life. And work out your own way of doing this. In this way you will prepare the way for the revolution. The flames will start here and there, and our fellow idealists will band together instantly. So forget about self-interest, and do not think about your own name or fame. Just die, just sleep. Never seek wisdom, but take the road of ignorance and come to know the height of great folly.\(^1\)

THE PLAGUE OF THE COUNTRYSIDE

In contrast to the cult of the all-powerful State which distinguished the ultranationalist movements in Europe, a great deal of Japanese ultranationalism was marked by a nostalgic longing for the values of primitive agrarian society. Several theorists turned from the evils of their society to envision a society with less government, more local autonomy, and more closely knit ties of familial solidarity. These ties would of course culminate in the person of the emperor as father of the nation, but the total structure they envisioned would necessarily remain very different from the highly centralized and industrialized society which Japan was developing.

The most influential exponent of this position were Tachibana Kosaburō (still alive) and Gondo Seikē (1866-1937). Both of them owed much to traditional Taoist utopian ideals of social organization. Tachibana wrote that a state could exist forever only under agrarian communalism, and he warned that “Japan cannot be herself if separated from the earth.” Gondo, for his part, felt that Japan had been founded on the principle of autonomous living, in which “the sovereign does not go far beyond setting examples, thereby giving his people a good standard.” Gondo felt that the small-scale groupings of society in primitive times were the only natural and desirable ones, and his writings show a profound distrust of big government and big army.

Together with this praise of primitive society came laments for the distress of the villagers in modern Japan. Victimized by big government, big business, and by the burden of the wasteful military, the villagers were being deprived of their autonomy and their livelihood. Instead of the equality of primitive communism, Japanese society was showing a very unhealthy class differentiation. For Tachibana this was an evil of urbanization; “according to a common expression,” he wrote, “Tokyo is the hub of the world. But I regret to say that Tokyo appears to me nothing but a branch shop of London.” Gondo too lamented the decline of agrarian life, “the foundation of the country and the source of habits and customs,” while “Tokyo and other cities have expanded out of all proportion to agrarian villages and are built up with great tall buildings.” Inequalities of this sort presaged the doom of what he called the “bureaucratic administration patterned after the Prussian style of nationalism.”

Thus the agrarian-conscious rightists found traditional grounds for a strong attack against their society. They did not entirely renounce industrialization and machinery, for it had its necessary role in livelihood and national defense. But the unjust social structure upon which Japan’s modern society rested was, they thought, likely to make all plans for defense and reform go wrong.

Writings of this sort had a considerable appeal to the young officers in the army. By the Shōwa Period Japan’s officer corps was no longer dominated by members of the samurai class, but it was increasingly drawn from the countryside and the peasantry. Discontented with what they saw in the urban sector of Japanese life, unable to understand why their senior commanders worked with the politicians and businessmen, the young officers were prepared to accept Gondo’s explanation that the military clique was just another wing of the bureaucratic ruling class.

GONDO SEIKÉ

The Gap between the Privileged Classes and the Commoners

Gondo’s works, Principles of Autonomous People (Jichi mimpun) and Essay on the Self Salvation of Farm Villages (Nōon jikyūron), were written during the years of the Great Depression when distress in the villages was most acute. His writings served in a measure as the ideology of the young officers who struck down Premier Inukai in May of 1932. Gondo himself, however, had little or no connection with the extremists who were moved to action by his writings.

[From Gondo, Jichi mimpun, pp. 185–88]

[262]

[263]
It was during this period [the late nineteenth century] that the criminal law was codified, civil law was codified, the system of cities, towns, and villages was put into effect, and the protection of private fortunes was really established on the principle of property rights. This made those who profit without working and the members of the privileged classes the pampered favorites of the state. The bureaucracy, the zemstvo, and the military became the three supports of the state, the political parties attached themselves to them, and the scholars fawned upon them. These groups allied with each other through marriage and they all combined to form a single group. In a country so ordered, it is quite obvious that no matter how it may be kept up in the future, the nation's military affairs cannot be supported by means of the privileged class of military alone. I am not an advocate of disarmament nor am I a pacifist. I have a sincere desire for adequate national defense. For that very reason I have strong misgivings about the present system of military preparation. Leaving aside a detailed discussion for another time, I will say here only that even if we train millions of soldiers, unless we are able to produce the weapons and necessary supplies in quantity, the soldiers in the line will be no more than puppets. It is well known that our numbers of primary and secondary reserves and our capacity to train troops and supply material are military secrets, and there is no use in trying to be specific about them. But actually it is a deplorable state of affairs. The situation had its origin in the period after the Russo-Japanese War, when one faction rashly added to the number of people living on army appropriations in order to add to the prestige of the military clique.

The change in popular sentiment in all nations after the First World War, largely a result of economic theories, was also reflected in great changes in this country. Moreover, with the Russian revolution, the disorders on the China mainland, the ebb and flow of Eastern and Western, old and new thought, took place partly in response to economic pressures and partly to scientific advance. The idea of a militaristic, Prussian nationalism declined into such a foul state of decay that not even the dogs would eat it. If only Japan had, in accord with the spirit of the times, persevered in this course, might she not have been able to take her place at the world game-board? But there seems to be something more or less frightening in any sort of militaristic administration. Let me explain.

The empty gesture of reducing strength by four divisions was carried out. Yet in spite of this military appropriations have not been reduced in the slightest. There is nothing very assuring about such slipshod management of affairs in this critical period of change, and in the wake of the earthquake and fire [of 1923].

In militaristic states, whether of early or recent times, the plutocracy never fails to come out on top. When the plutocrats conspire with those who hold political power, the resources of the people fall under their control almost before one is aware of what is happening. When this happens, the common people fall upon evil days; they are pursued by cold and hunger, and unless they work in the midst of their tears as tools of the plutocrats and those holding political power they cannot stay alive. When people are pursued by hunger and have to work tearfully in the face of death, what sort of human rights do you suppose remain? Already the country's basic resources—land, raw materials, the machinery of transport and finance, mines, fishing grounds—are, for the most part, becoming the private property of a small number of powerful capitalists. In this setting have come labor disputes and tenancy problems. In the beginning, the capitalists held themselves aloof from these, but as their base became stronger and as they furthermore established close contacts with various parts of European society, they were the ones who, when the European labor practices came to be stressed, set up various institutions to smooth adjustments. These then became a part of the general social policy, and the government too began step by step to set up similar bureaus; they talked about reforms. The government's new social bureaus, and the setting up of officials concerned with tenancy, are all precious items of this sort. But trying to reconcile capital and labor by such means in these times makes about as much sense as trying to find fish by climbing trees. In prosperous times, Bismarck's social policies might have secured a certain degree of tranquility in Germany for a while. Now, however, not only do the laborers and tenants themselves see through the capitalists and politicians, but the amount of knowledge built up by scholarly research and pragmatic study which tends to support the laborers and tenants is actually coming to exceed that of the scholars who are hirelings of the capitalists or who comprise some of the trash in the bureaucracy. If only they could work with the backing of the law, some of the temporizing measures of those in power could probably be carried out, but actually it is totally unrealistic to expect cooperation or reforms.
Since the conditions under which the people live are in fact as I have already indicated, the foundations of the military regime cannot be secure. Everybody believes that the military, men who hold office for life, are guaranteed an adequate living, and so they are usually conspicuously loyal, but Kita was in China during the revolution of 1911, and his chagrin at the have to shed their blood are all sons and brothers of the common people. The great majority of these soldiers were born in poverty and his revolution (Shinsa kokumei gaiish) criticized the Japanese activists in ship; they entered the barracks, and then had to submit to the orders for placing their reliance upon Sun Yat-sen, whom Kita now saw their superior officers. As the sons and brothers of the common people, a superficial user of Western slogans, instead of working for a better future they will not under any circumstances forget that they are themselves of Western and Oriental ideologies. Kita’s early socialism was common people. If, then, we infer what goes on in their minds, and now becoming more “Oriental”; henceforth he would call for a blend of this problem of the commoners’ plight and the privileged classes as modern revolutionary thought and Oriental wisdom which he called kaitoism, think of the changes that will take place in men’s hearts; kaitoism. Kita also criticized the policy of the Japanese authorities in back on the labor and tenant problems—from disturbance to struggle. In particular he resented the maneuverings of the zaibatsu houses and from struggle, what will come? Granted, it is the army’s duty to offer loans had, it seemed to him, helped to drive the Chinese maintain peace and order, but the good and obedient soldiers in the revolutionaries into their compromise with the conservative Yuan Shih, whom you are leading are for the most part the sons and brothers of the middle in order to avoid Japanese exploitation. Thus Kita, remaining convinced of the inevitability of a revolutionary Asia, now saw the need for profound changes in Japanese society to enable Japan to assume the leadership in the new Asia. Selfish zaibatsu would have to be curbed, corrupt politicians would be done away with, and the Imperial Household itself must undergo changes to free it from the crippling influence of the timid bureaucrats who were at the beck and call of their zaibatsu and clerical party colleagues.

There can be no mistaking the genuine radicalism of Kita’s views. He advocated sweeping changes in all sectors of Japanese society—seizure and nationalization of major industries and fortunes, an eight-hour work week, and a land reform program. Nor is there much doubt of his proclivity for extremism. His 1926 preface hailed the murderer of Yasuda Zen’iro, Toshi Heigo, as a man whose ideology had been based on the spirit of his own writings. Kita himself had strong ties with the young officers whose concern over Japan’s China policy played such an important role in the military putsches of the 1930s. He was involved with the Kōdō ha (Imperial Way faction), the radical group responsible for the mutiny which began with a wave of assassination attempts and ended with the seizure of central Tokyo on February 26, 1936. Arrested then, Kita was executed in 1937. His book, banned until the end of the Second World