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THE JAPANESE MARTYRS.



Original Editorial Staff of "Yorozu Cho-ho."

PRICE ONE PENNY.

FREEDOM PRESS, 127 OSSULSTON STREET, LONDON, N.W.

Kotoku's Life and Work.

On January 24, 1911, the Japanese Government executed twelve Anarchists, after a secret trial, on a false charge of plotting against the Emperor. Among those executed, the best known were Denjiro Kotoku and his wife, Suga Kanno. The following article (reprinted from *Freedom*, February, 1911) was written by one who knew Kotoku personally.

DENJIRO KOTOKU was born about 40 years ago in Tosa (Province Shikoku), the son of one who would now be termed a doctor. He came early under the influence of a tutor in his native town who was much advanced for his time, and who already began to question whether "Mitsuhito" rules by divine right, and if the story that his Imperial Japanese Majesty is the "direct Descendant of the Sun" can really be given any credence. As far as I know, Kotoku never attended any middle school, high school, or university, and it is therefore absurd to put "Dr." before his name. A little story will suffice to prove my case. I spoke to him of a mutual doctor friend, and it seems I used "Dr." once too often. Said he, slightly vexed, cigarette in one hand and in the other resting his head: "Why do you omit putting the vocation of others before their name, and never once forget 'Dr.' when you speak of K——?" Of course, it's useless for me to state that I had any intelligent reply to his rather quiet, opportune query.

Kotoku, who strongly resembles a Korean, is gentle, kind, and rather retiring; he is slightly below the stature of the average Japanese, but intellectually so much above them.

Notwithstanding all statements to the contrary, he was editor-in-chief of Japan's most popular paper, published in Tokio, the *Yaradsu-Chohu*, which publication can easily bear comparison with the infamous Hearst sheets of this country. Previous to the outbreak of hostilities between Japan and Russia, on account of his anti-war attitude he resigned, and with him Sakai, Nishikawa, and Ishikawa, who with Kotoku form the group in the photograph I enclose. The signatures are in Kotoku's handwriting.

As the spokesman of the anti-war party, he incurred the displeasure of the Government. From that time on Kotoku and his followers were marked men. Together with the men in the photograph, and others, he started a weekly paper known as the *Heimin-Shimbun* (the Paper of the Common People), which was soon suppressed by the authorities, but was followed by *Hikari* (Light). This publication also was suppressed, and

was followed by *Chocugen* (Straightforward), which went the way its predecessors did. By this time Sakai, Nishikawa, and Kotoku, in the order mentioned, took their turns and became involuntary boarders of the Japanese Government. "Heimin-Sha" (the People's Publishing House), however, went on turning out pamphlets and books too numerous to mention. The police raided the establishment and confiscated everything, by so doing thinking conservatism is safe and that awful teaching of "revolutionary Socialism and Industrialism" is once for all banished from the shores of the Island Empire.

Kotoku's health was much impaired during his imprisonment (which he, like the rest of them, put to good use by the study of languages), so Dr. Tokidairo Kato suggested that Kotoku might accompany his eldest son (also a doctor) to America, and later to Europe, at the expense of Dr. Kato. He accepted, went to America, and got acquainted with a new phase of political and economic ideas. During his stay in San Francisco the awful earthquake and fire came between him and the plans of the Katos, so they returned to Japan.

After his return, strong in health, with the support of a rich young fellow countryman (but who later, so it is said, turned traitor and police spy), he started the daily *Heimin-Shimbun*, with a great circulation. For his unquestioned ability as a writer (some of his contemporaries call him the most poetic writer of modern Japan), his sincerity, honesty, and all that is essential to make a good and true man, is acknowledged even by his enemies. But the daily *Heimin-Shimbun* had a short life, and went the same way by the same methods as its predecessors.

From Tokio, the capital of Japan, to the smallest hamlet, Kotoku went about preaching the gospel of human emancipation, fearlessly and straight. No Divinity, said he, would look on and allow a state of things in which the children he created in his own image may starve or be sold into *yoshiwaras* (brothels).—And here let me bring to your notice that after the Russo-Japanese War, Japanese women were actually sold *by weight* for the purpose of prostitution in China. Incredible as it may seem, it is said that during the war, in the city of Tientsin, North China, in the Japanese concession, women of the Red Cross Society, with the regalia and emblem on them, prostituted themselves for the benefit of that organisation.—No person of authority, Kotoku said, has any claim to divinity if he be blind to the poverty and depravity of his immediate surroundings.

Is it any wonder that Kotoku became more and more the thorn in the flesh of the governing class, and at all costs had to be made impossible, no matter how low and despicable the means by which to accomplish their infernal purpose.

I understand that early in August, while already on board a ship bound for America, whence he intended to go to Europe,

to attend the International Socialist Congress in Copenhagen, he was arrested, charged, the gods may know with what not, and the result is too well known to enter into details about. I have written to about eight people in various stations of life, asking for details concerning the affair; but it is rather doubtful whether I will get the desired information, in view of the terrible persecutions of people with progressive ideas and the working of the most perfect system of espionage the world has ever known. The Christian nations of the Occident, including Russia, might go to school to the little brown man, with whom spying is a most accomplished art.

Suga Kanno, Kotoku's wife and co-worker, was twenty-nine years of age. She did not have regular schooling, but studied under private teachers. The exact date of their marriage is unknown to me, but it was soon after a Socialist meeting at the *Kiukikwan* some three years ago. She is one of the most intellectual women of Japan; fearless, kind, and "true blue." Has written several novels, and was a regular contributor to magazines and newspapers. Her brother, Massao Kanno, publishes the *Japanese Daily News* in Los Angeles, California, but will not allow himself to be interviewed by me.

T. Sakai is about the same age as Kotoku, and was born in Kokura (Province Kiushu), the son of a "Samurai" (a retainer of the Imperial dynasty, who in feudal times was privileged to wear two swords: the military caste). He is well set, slightly inclined to be corpulent. For several years he was a co-worker with Kotoku, and was enthusiastically imbued with the same spirit and principle as his friend.

And now they are to die.

What is the crime for which they are condemned? Did they really conspire against the Imperial family? No! Their crime consisted chiefly in writing and speaking against the exploitation of the working class. Enlightening and arousing the toilers to their true interests. And that is the only way they brought on themselves the wrath of the powers that be.

Kotoku and the rest of that little band of comrades will go to their doom—die as stoical and unconcerned as only their kind and race know how.

L. F.

"ROUGHEDGE-EDELWEISS."
(Pasadena, Calif.)

January 18.

FREEDOM.

A JOURNAL OF ANARCHIST COMMUNISM (Established 1886).

Monthly, One Penny.

A specimen copy, containing a list of Anarchist books and pamphlets, will be sent post-free on application.

FREEDOM PRESS, 127 OSSULSTON STREET, LONDON, N.W.