

# Recent Development of Japanese Labor Revolt

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**A**NGER goes before destruction. An angry capitalistic government is suicidally tearing down what it built in the past. Capitalists of Japan are losing their temper and are abusing the very social institutions which they have preached must be respected and obeyed by the people. These self-destructive measures have made a steady progress as the ideas of the social revolution have advanced.

A most desperate battle is being fought against indestructible ideas and principles which have been making progress all over Japan. The Japanese government has been suppressing the socialist movement. It has excluded the books of Lenin and Trotsky and has expelled Bolshevik propagandists from Japan. But the ideas of Bolshevism have been permeating among the Japanese mass.

You may suppress every known propagandist and put them into prison, and you may terrorize the Bolshevik propaganda, but you cannot arrest the thoughts in the minds of the people on the onswEEPing Bolshevik revolution, which acts and reacts in spite of all gag laws and gendarmes.

Our capitalists and capitalistic government are trying to mislead the awakened masses by camouflaged social reforms and liberal promises for the betterment of labor conditions. These apparent relaxations on the part of the ruling classes have given great impetus to the workers and they have been demanding more and more as the ruling classes have been yielding to them. The power and influence of the workers grows stronger than ever.

A few months ago appeared among the ranks of one of the regiments a most radical piece of literature on the Imperial Rescript. This was specially addressed to the army and was, of course, handled underground. It tore the principle contained in the Rescript to pieces, from the standpoint of Bolshevik ideas. It was skilfully distributed among the soldiers through the mails by unknown hands. This successful underground work so shocked the government that it drove the authorities to an extreme of terror. The entire forces of the government and the army went heart and soul into the work of hunting out the criminals who had committed the greatest criminal act in Japan. The culprit, if captured, would be tried in the highest and final court of Japan, a closed tribunal, and would be sentenced to death, just like Comrade Kotoku. But they could not find any one even to frame up!

It is not reported in the press at all—the very report would cause punishment by the death-penalty—but the fact is now well known to the people.

The authorities have admitted, again and again, that Bolshevik propaganda was the cause of the Korean uprisings, and that this propaganda has been carried on within the army and outside by soldiers who have been converted to Bolshevik ideas in Siberia. Every suspect is blacklisted. But it is known to the public as a fact that the Japanese soldiers in Siberia have been influenced by the revolutionary ideas spread by Bolshevik propaganda in the army, some of the soldiers having already joined the Bolshevik forces in Siberia.

Since the rice riots of August 1918 the masses have awakened and asserted their power and have threatened the ruling classes. The ruling classes of Japan have been decaying at the core for some time. The powerful bureaucracy of Japan has also

been losing its influence over the people on account of economic conditions in Japan. Prices of necessities, including house rentals, have been rising without limit. A koku of rice which used to cost \$6—\$7 now costs \$25—\$27 (5 bushels). The average of food prices over those of the pre-war period is 130%, while the average rise in wages has been only 70%.

Men with fixed salaries, such as the government employes and army officers of lower rank, have suffered the most, and have lately organized into a Salaried Men's Union. At this time the entire staff of the Treasury Department is out on strike for higher salary, which fact is as yet held back by the government, though cabled to a certain firm in New York. There have been many strikes of government employes from time to time for better pay, but this is the first time a government department such as the Treasury has faced a strike of the entire force, and this is to be interpreted as evidence of the loss of prestige of the ruling power and of its discipline.

The Japanese working classes have been testing the power of mass action since the rice riots of August 1918. They have been increasing their awakened activity in the industrial world. Strikes and riots in the factories and mines have been increasing all over the country.

The recent development of the labor movement is something unique and very interesting. It shows a native adaptability of the Japanese workers to their situation. The Japanese have really a natural trait of adjusting themselves to their environment—the trait that accounts for the unique civilization in the feudal regime.

Now the Japanese workers have no right to organize unions. A labor strike is a crime and strikers are subject to arrest and imprisonment for six months at hard labor. There is therefore no organized labor union to aid the strike. Nevertheless during the last two months strikes have been increasing in number and strength, many big strikes involving thousands of workers in some of the larger factories. The Tokyo Government Arsenal met with a strike call of all its 26,000 men and women employes. This strike was lost by the workers on account of the extraordinary activity of the gendarmes and through treachery of the officers. The leaders were arrested and put into prison long after the strike was settled. Then there was the printer's strike which stopped all the Tokyo dailies (16) for four days. As the strikes increase the oppressive measures of the government become much more drastic. At one time last Spring the government pledged itself publicly to the effect that it would not enforce the particular clause of the police law which practically condemns the strike. But the government used this law to the limit against the strike leaders. This treacherous performance caused deep indignation of the working classes, supported by the public at large.

This feeling against the oppressive measures of the government was still more heightened by the dishonest method of electing the labor delegate to the International Labor Conference at Washington, D. C., now in session. This Conference is not of interest to the western proletariat but it is to the Japanese, and especially to the Japanese employes who have been enjoying the

full power of exploiting labor with unlimited hours and wages under the level of sustenance. The Japanese government has undertaken the task of deceiving the Conference at Washington with the aid and support of Great Britain, which wants India excluded from the provisions of the Conference such as the 8-hour day, child labor and night work.

This Conference gave the workers of Japan a supreme chance to agitate for a labor representative of their own. Within a few months there sprang up many labor associations, some of them under the direct or indirect solicitation of the government, to be used to camouflage the bourgeois delegate of labor as selected by real labor bodies. This trickery of the government so provoked the workers that even the yellow labor organizations bolted from the meeting at which the labor delegate was to be elected. The Japanese government was rightly condemned for its dishonest action by the International Labor Conference.

These and many other happenings have caused the Japanese masses more boldly than ever to demand their social and economic betterment. Lately they have found a better method of making their demands, through sabotage rather than the strike. I know from my own personal contact that the Japanese workers are accustomed to the use of sabotage, mostly destructive, in furtherance of their strikes, just as historically the Japanese have had the experiences of violent mass assertions to demand the righting of their grievance during the feudal regime. The rice riots of last August show the destructive workings of the masses.

But the recent use of sabotage is something new. It is open and in the form of mass action, or rather a mass idleness. To give a concrete instance. At the Kawasaki Shipbuilding yards, at Kobe, 15,000 employes demanded a 50% wage increase and the 8-hour day. Upon the refusal of their demands they all decided to carry out a program of sabotage. They reported at the factory every morning at the usual hour, with every one of the 15,000 at his place of work. Machines are in motion, but with horse power cut in two, and nothing is produced. Besides the 15,000 workers there are 500 engineers and 800 foremen and supervisors. The foreman dared not fire any of the workers because all the 15,000 are acting like a single man! This passive form of sabotage continued for 10 days, beginning on September 18th. On the 29th it was decided by unanimous referendum vote to continue the sabotage. A committee was sent to negotiate with the President of the Company, but without result. The workers of two other branches of the company declared a sympathetic sabotage, but still the demands were stubbornly ignored. Finally the engineers acted in a body to express their sympathy toward the sabotegers and asked the President to grant their demands. Then the 800 bosses followed the example of the engineers. This concerted stand of all the employes of the company made the stiff-necked President yield to the workers. Thus by a very quiet and peaceful method—the passive sabotage—15,000 workers obtained the 8-hour day with 10-hour pay and 50% increase in wages, together with wages for the days of sabotage!

This conspicuously successful and clear cut example of passive sabotage by the workers of the Kawasaki shipbuilding ind-

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