

# The Hara Ministry and the Bolsheviki

By Sen Katagama

RECENT reports on the social conditions in Japan are misleading. The real facts are either concealed or misrepresented, especially regarding the Socialist movement. A report printed recently in *The New York Call* to the effect that a Socialist Party has been formed and that Socialists have discontinued their underground work and are now functioning in the open is entirely misleading. The talk about the formation of a Socialist Party is of the same nature as the report printed in *The Heimin*, published in New York, that a Royal Socialist Party was to be formed by the tacit understanding of the present Hara ministry.

It is true that many attempts have been made since the great rice riots in August, 1918, by the government and the ruling classes to institute schemes for "social betterment." But they have proved to be simply camouflage while in reality the government has been tightening its brutal grip on the Marxian Socialists. On this point a good comrade wrote me recently that Socialists who have not come to terms with the government, as national or patriotic Socialists, are hounded down and oppressed. All their acts are closely followed, their telephone calls are watched and their mail is opened, all of which is contrary to the constitutional guarantees. Public meetings are forbidden, in fact, they are not allowed to carry on any form of propaganda whatever.

From the reports in the bourgeois press it would seem that the government has changed from an autocratic bureaucracy to liberal. In reality it is becoming more and more autocratic though perhaps in a little more civilized or camouflaged manner than formerly. To the Marxian Socialists there is no liberty. There is of course a certain bourgeois freedom, like the democratic freedom of the United States; those who are in favor of the government and the ruling classes have to a certain extent freedom of press and assembly, but even they have no real liberty. For instance no reports of the uprisings in Korea were printed in the press, except the official dispatches given out by the government. The liberal papers and magazines are bound and gagged, not by any law but by the arbitrary acts of the government.

At the beginning of the present year a movement for the extension of the franchise became very strong. It grew, at one time into a big national movement. By force of circumstances the government was unable to suppress it and Socialists seized the opportunity presented at some of the meetings to make speeches. To check this movement the government introduced a bill to reduce the tax qualification from 10 yen to 3 yen. This means that the million and a half voters will be increased to somewhere between two and two and a half million out of a population of over sixty-five millions, so even under the new electoral law the vast majority of the people, the workers, are entirely excluded from participation in the elections. This bill was hastily prepared and still more hastily passed by both houses of the Imperial Diet. It should be explained here that the franchise qualification tax is a national tax and does not include local taxation. Japan is a country of indirect taxation, more than 70 per cent of the budget being raised by indirect taxation.

There is a great unrest among the Japanese people at present. The many attempts by the ruling classes to pacify the workers are proving to be added fuel to the fire of discontent that

will some day destroy the present bureaucratic government. The government feels this, the ruling classes feel it and the working masses are becoming daily more conscious of the pressure of their burdens and are looking for a chance to get rid of them.

It is true that the study of Marxian Socialism recently became very popular. The study of *Das Kapital* has been taken up by the press of the country. Several persons and groups have announced their intention of translating *Kapital*, and several monthlies have appeared which are devoted to the study of Socialism, though mostly confining themselves to the academic and theoretical side of the subject and not venturing into the field of its application to present day conditions. The government's fear of the spread of Socialism and of the Socialists has changed recently to fear of Bolshevism and the Bolsheviki. Theoretical Socialism is freely discussed in the press, translations from books and foreign magazine articles are plentiful, but any discussion of Japanese social conditions is sternly prohibited. The government and the ruling classes fear that the people may awaken and begin to act from a Socialist standpoint.

Present day conditions cause many dangers to the bourgeoisie. The prices of food are ever on the increase; far higher than those of last August, when the rice riots occurred. The armistice and the coming of peace brought much unemployment while rent and other expenses are increasing enormously. The wages of those who are employed are being cut down on account of the prevalence of unemployment.

Among the middle classes also there is much unrest. In Japan the middle classes are numerically dominant. They comprise petty army and naval officers, petty bureaucrats, and countless small merchants and farmers. These middle classes are suffering more and more on account of the high cost of living and the pressure from the big capitalists. Policemen and grammar school teachers are among the poorest paid workers, while the lower ranks of military and naval officers, whose incomes have not risen in proportion to the cost of the necessities of living, are badly hit by the rise in prices.

The lowest strata of society shows many signs of awakening. The industrial proletariat is fast absorbing the ideas of Bolshevism and social revolution. The workers are learning from the soldiers who have been in Siberia and from the news in the daily press. Between thirty and forty thousand soldiers who have returned from Siberia have become Bolshevik propagandists. They are all reservists and, from all parts of the country, on their return to civilian life they mingle with the workers. It is often reported with terror that Bolshevism is spreading in the Japanese army.

Such are the conditions in Japan just now, and the Hara ministry is attempting in a thousand ways to stop the spread of Bolshevism throughout the country. The government and the ruling classes are terror-stricken at the spread of Bolshevism; they think that compared with Bolshevism, Socialism is tame and that its study can be allowed without danger. But real Marxian Socialists like Comrades Sakai and Yamakawa are closely watched, they are practically prisoners at their own ex-

pense, and have to get their living under very difficult conditions.

Everything favors the coming of social revolution, and all the camouflaged works of the rulers only accelerate the event. The Hara ministry wants Socialism tamed in Japan by discriminating between revolutionary Socialists and moderates. But things will result contrary to their wishes.

Now-a-days the Japs are most unpopular people in the eyes of the world, on account of the Japanese government's brutal policy in Korea, its militaristic avariciousness in the matter of Shantung and the Siberian invasion. In the latter adventure Japan is foolishly acting as the hangman for Allied capitalists. In order to conceal the worst phases of the Paris treaty the capitalist press of the entire world is endeavoring to paint the Shantung crime of Japan as blacker and worse than any other. Japan is now painted as the worst enemy of humanity; brutal, aggressive and imperialistic in its foreign policy in the Far East, the Prussia of Asia, by intelligent Chinese gentlemen and their friends in America. The writer is not in the least concerned with whether or not these attacks are deserved. But I am firmly convinced that the Japanese workers will soon realize the true situation they are placed in, especially bearing in mind the example of the German workers who are now saddled with the responsibility for Prussian militarism, the Kaiser and the war of 1914!

They will see that the best way to save Japan and themselves is to adopt the method of the Russian workers: Bolshevism and the Soviet form of government. No wonder that the Japanese government is greatly exercised over the rapid spread of Bolshevik ideas among the people. It is not so difficult for the Japanese workers to learn from Russia and particularly from Siberia. It is no theory placed before them, but the facts of Russian life; enjoyed by the workers and peasants during the past twenty months. The Japanese workers and peasants will soon learn to put the same ideas into practice. Bolshevism translated into the everyday life of the workers can be understood by the people much more easily than the theory of Bolshevism.

It is reported that Hungarian war prisoners who studied for four months in Petrograd night schools are better scholars than children who studied for ten years in Hungarian schools. Of the common soldier prisoners in Russia, who studied only a few months in Petrograd, sixteen are now professors in Hungarian universities, while two hundred are grammar school teachers. Education under Bolshevik rule must have been very much simplified in its methods. And not only education, but all other things have been greatly simplified, for the artificial and wasteful in life has been done away with in Russia: Capitalism and its exploitation of labor is no more. The elaborate system of national economy and industry may be very complicated to outsiders but the Russian workers and peasants are part of the system, not like the workers in the capitalistic national and industrial system of production and distribution.

There are very good prospects for the early acceptance and practice of Bolshevism by the Japanese workers and peasants. Governmental fear and the consequent suppression and oppression will not stop the spread of Bolshevism in Japan; it is coming there as a concrete fact, out of the living history of Russia.