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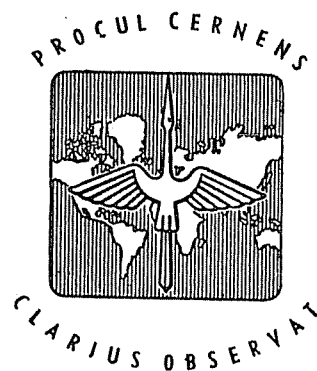
OCCASIONAL PAPERS

The Role of Peasant Organisations in the  
Japanese Land Reform

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(No. 12, October 1971)



*Institute of Social Studies*  
THE HAGUE - THE NETHERLANDS

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## THE ROLE OF PEASANT ORGANISATIONS IN THE JAPANESE LAND REFORM

Gerrit Huizer

Different kinds of peasant organisations and movements have existed in Japan in the past centuries. Most spectacular were the spontaneous revolts of peasants in particular areas where for some reason land tenancy conditions became unbearable. Thus, in one of the villages in the valley north of Matsumoto, Nagano Prefecture, a riot broke out in 1725. The reason was that because of a particularly bad agricultural year the tenants had no produce to pay the tax in kind, and no food for their own subsistence. They asked the landlords to buy food for them and pay the taxes (as an advance), but the latter refused to do so. In one village, out of desperation, about 500 tenants then stormed the houses and warehouses of the landlords and destroyed them. The tenants of this village at the far end of the valley started to march towards the local capital Matsumoto; on their way, many other villages joined them, similarly storming the landlords' properties. Some landlords tried in vain to organise their tenants to combat the growing stream of rioting peasants, about 30,000 of whom were finally marching towards Matsumoto. Only the mediatory efforts and persuasion by one highly respected land-owning family made the tenants lose some of their motivation, while the appearance of a great many samurai (warriors) from Matsumoto Castle, threatening to use their guns, made them finally return to their homes. Neither tenants nor landlords were killed in the movement.<sup>1</sup> This was one example of movements that sometimes occurred.

Between 1600 and the end of the Tokugawa regime in 1868, about 3,000 peasant riots occurred, mostly in waves in periods of famine.<sup>2</sup> As a result of the Meiji Restoration and the introduction after 1870 of a western type of private land-ownership in rural areas, the contrast between a new class

1. Oral history collected during interviews with peasant leaders in Ohmachi, Nagano Prefecture.
2. M.H.Kohachiro Takahashi, "Mouvements paysans et problèmes agraires au Japon de la fin du 18me siècle à nos jours", Enquête sur Mouvements Paysans et Problèmes Agraires de la Fin du 18me Siècle à Nos Jours, Commission Internationale d'Histoire des Mouvements Sociaux et des Structures Sociales, mimeo., pp. 3-8.

of landlords (jinushi) and tenants (kosaku) increased, resulting in more protest movements. Protest was also directed against government policies of the Meiji period, such as conscription, the new land taxes and the imposed administrative reorganisation in the rural areas. The changes introduced under the Meiji regime were on the whole disadvantageous to the peasants, who continued to live under conditions similar to those existing under the feudal system predominant before the Tokugawa regime fell in 1868.

Official policies and certain groups of landlords later started to be concerned about the tendency towards increasing landlessness as being dangerous to social stability. Around 1890 efforts were undertaken to regulate tenancy through legislation. Cooperative associations to protect small farmers and to maintain a "stable rural society"<sup>3</sup> were initiated; from 1891 appropriate cooperative legislation was under consideration until in 1900 the Industrial Cooperative Law was promulgated (dealing mainly with Agricultural Cooperatives). A little earlier, in 1899, an Agricultural Association Law had been passed to create associations designed to improve agricultural methods. It was noted, however:

"But none of these measures sought to tackle agricultural problems by means which would be in any way inimical to the interests of the landlords. The Agricultural Association Law, in fact, helped to confirm and organise the power of the landlords in the villages. The most that such measures could hope to do about the tenancy system was to check its spread by strengthening the position of the peasant proprietor who still owned his own land and by saving him from the indebtedness which might end in its loss. The influence of the landlords was at this time sufficiently powerful for there to be no question of the bureaucracy taking any action detrimental to their interests."<sup>4</sup>

In this period about one-third of the members of the Diet (National Congress) directly represented the agrarian landed class.<sup>5</sup> It was more or less in the same period that the Public Order Police Law was promulgated (March 1900), prohibiting organised action by the workers on the grounds that this would constitute a disturbance of public peace.

The cooperatives were generally a federation of buraku (hamlet) organisations. Burakus are clusters of 30 to 40 farming households, representing extended families. The structure of government administration

3. IDACA, Agricultural Cooperative Movement in Japan, (Tokyo: The Institute for the Development of Agricultural Cooperation in Asia, undated), p. 15.

4. R.P.Dore, Land Reform in Japan (Oxford University Press, 1959), p. 64.

5. Ibid.

introduced after the Meiji Restoration was designed to control such local organisations from above.<sup>6</sup> A group of burakus together constituted a village and the villages were integrated into prefectures. The national government exercised authority over the prefectures and through these down to the village and buraku levels. This hierarchy existed in the structure of the government administration as well as in the cooperatives and agricultural associations.

"Both types had government stimulation and encouragement, and both were made up almost exclusively of landlords. Since there was little horizontal association among farmer-cultivators -- no sense of unity had developed among them -- the landlords, through their mutual associations operating as village level organisations, were the bases for prefectural and national federations."<sup>7</sup>

The landlords were the leaders at all levels, particularly in the buraku. Although often related through blood relationship with other buraku members, these "bosses" felt themselves superior to the ordinary farmers.<sup>8</sup> As one scholar noted, the general assembly of buraku members was not the organ of democratic expression of the members' will, but rather a means through which the upper class controlled the group.<sup>9</sup> "Free labour for the community", a kind of corvée, was organised by the landlords mainly for their own benefit, and frequently formed a heavy burden for the less privileged members of the buraku.<sup>10</sup>

Although outstanding figures arose almost everywhere, the situation in the buraku was complicated by the fact that the dividing line between landlords, small farmers and tenants was generally not clearcut. Many tenants were part-owners of very small plots and many landlords were relatively small, so that they almost approximated a farmer-operator. Differences were often not very outspoken and the distribution of buraku members on the ascribed local status ladder was quite gradual.

Sometimes changes tended to upset or modify the existing system. During World War I, in particular, the landlords benefited economically.

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6. Keiji Kamiya and David E. Lindstrom, Farmers' Organisations and their Role in Community Development in Japan (FAO Seminar-cum-Study Tour on Farmers' Organisations, Tokyo, November 1963), p. 4.

7. Ibid., p. 5.

8. Ibid.

9. T. Ushiomu, La Communauté Rurale au Japon (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1962), p. 12.

10. Ibid., p. 15.

Land prices went up and landowners had many opportunities for profitable speculation, while small farmers lost their lands through indebtedness, partly a result of inflationary tendencies. Absentee landlordism increased and tenant farmers were forced to pay higher rents in kind. This went to such an extreme that tenants had insufficient rice for their own survival. The result was the last and largest spontaneous peasant revolts called the "pre-industrial riots",<sup>11</sup> the Rice Riots of 1918 that spread to more than 30 prefectures and lasted 42 days.

During the First World War, rapidly increasing industrialisation gave greater employment opportunities which caused an outflow of people from the rural areas towards industry.<sup>12</sup> The bargaining position of urban labour and of the peasantry improved somewhat, the formation of labour unions accelerated and also the occurrence of strikes. This reflected on the peasantry:

"Of importance was the increase of labour strikes and union organisations. It was typical that the younger brother who had gone to the city to work would tell about this when visiting home in the village. Sometimes he would use his experience to the advantage in a tenant-landlord dispute."<sup>13</sup>

As we have noted, the First World War brought many changes to the rural areas, mainly favourable to the landlords. However, one effect of industrialisation was an improvement in the tenants' bargaining position. Because of the relative labour shortage, they were able to threaten the landlords with non-cultivation of the land if they did not get a reduction in rent. Since experiments by the landlords to cultivate with machinery proved less profitable than the traditional tenant cultivation, they often had to give in to these demands.

The influence of people who had worked in industry was strongly felt soon after the war when industry passed through a severe crisis. Many workers were dismissed and returned to their already overcrowded villages. Tension increased rapidly since the backward conditions in which tenants generally lived were more acutely felt by those who returned. The organising experience they had gained in industry was soon applied to bargaining for better tenancy conditions.

11. George O. Totten, The Social Democratic Movement in Prewar Japan (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1966), p. 34 ff.

12. Masao Takahashi, Modern Japanese Economy since 1868 (Tokyo: Kokusai Bunka Shinkokai, 1968), p. 97.

13. G.O. Totten, op.cit., p. 36.

The first formally organised tenant unions grew up in the areas around the new industrial centres, particularly Nagoya. The first local tenant organisations were reported around 1916 in the prefectures of Aichi, Gifu and Mie, soon to be followed by those of Osaka, Hyogo and Okayama, and a few years later in several prefectures of Kyushu, where there were many former industrial workers from the city of Fukuoka.<sup>14</sup> Local unions grew generally at the buraku level, more or less spontaneously, around rent disputes. Workers who had been dismissed because of union activities and had had to return to their villages were particularly influential in these activities. Several of them became effective peasant organisation leaders.

The need for an organisation at the national and prefectural levels was increasingly felt but did not materialise until 1922. The increasing acceptance of christian, democratic and socialist ideas by Japanese intellectuals and the spread of these ideas in many circles helped to prepare the ground. Another factor that favoured the rise of large-scale organisations representing the peasants' interests was that:

"On the national level the League of Nations' International Labour Organisation (ILO) had a direct influence. While it primarily affected labour policy, it also stimulated the agrarian movement since it proclaimed the right of tenant farmers to organise in their own interest -- an act which had been considered illegal in Japan but which the Japanese government, as a member of the ILO, found it increasingly difficult to deny."<sup>15</sup>

A group of intellectuals, pressmen, a missionary and a labour leader took the initiative in creating the Japanese Peasant Union (Nihon Nomin Kumiai, abbreviated: Nichinó). At the inaugural convention on April 9, 1922 in the YMCA building in Kobe about 120 persons participated, among them the wellknown christian socialist leaders T.Kagawa and G.Sugiyama. Initially, only 253 peasants were members of Nichinó while there were some 15 buraku chapters.<sup>16</sup> At first members of the many existing buraku unions affiliated on a personal basis, but soon affiliation became by groups. When the Second Convention of Nichinó was held on February 20, 1923 there were already 300 affiliated chapters and about 10,000 members.<sup>17</sup>

14. Information supplied by Mr.K.Aoki, a former peasant organisation leader who wrote a 6 volume History of the Japanese Agrarian Movement, Nihon Nomin Undo Shi (Tokyo, 1947); see also G.O.Totten, "Labour and Agrarian Disputes in Japan Following World War I", Economic Development and Cultural Change, Vol. 9, No. 1, October 1960, pp. 194 and p. 204; and R.P.Dore, op.cit., p. 69.

15. G.O.Totten, The Social Democratic Movement in Prewar Japan, op.cit., p. 37.

16. K.Aoki, op.cit., Vol. 3, p. 81.

17. Ibid., p. 235.

By 1926 the Nichinō claimed a dues-paying membership of about 68,000 peasants. Its main aim was still to reduce rents but it also had such political aims as legislation protecting the tenants and the rather vague objective of "socialisation of the land".<sup>18</sup> After universal suffrage was introduced in Japan in 1925, and the number of voters rose from 3 million to 14 million, Nichinō became politically more influential. Nichinō leaders circulated a request to the 28 labour federations with more than 1,000 members to form together a Workers and Peasants Party. Increasing involvement in political and ideological issues caused many consecutive splits and mergers among peasant organisations and political parties, which are difficult to unravel. One divisive point was whether to include all peasants and small landowners or only tenants. Another was between those who saw the tenants' struggle against the landlords as a class struggle directed toward overall social change, and those who were more in favour of compromise and the achievement of concrete benefits. It was observed that:

"These differences were primarily differences between leaders. Which national organisation any particular local tenant union was federated with depended more on personal connections with particular leaders than on ideological attachment to one doctrine rather than another. And, indeed, in their practical activities the various federations differed little from each other. Their chief function was to assist tenants engaged in disputes, to encourage the formation of local tenant unions in districts hitherto unorganised, and to direct and coordinate the formulation of tenants' demands."<sup>19</sup>

Whatever occurred at the national level, the main function of tenant unions was at the local level in rent disputes with landlords. Many of these disputes had been taken up by buraku unions before the national organisation existed, but the struggle at the local level was made more effective through the national union and its officials, often intellectuals.

As we have noted, tenancy disputes started during and after the First World War in areas near the large industrial centres of Nagoya, Osaka and Kobe. A Ministry of Agriculture and Commerce report (quoted by Dore as a typical example) gives the following general reasons why such tenancy disputes appeared and rapidly increased in spite of adverse conditions:

"The immediate cause was the tenants' demand for rent reduction, but the report enumerates several contributory factors. Many of the landlords were non-resident, and, of those who lived in the district, most led idle

18. R.P.Dore, op.cit., p. 74.

19. Ibid., op.cit., p. 77.



and useless lives showing no 'paternal care' for their tenants ('in one hamlet there are twenty-five landlords who devote themselves zealously to the tea-ceremony, but only two or three who bother to encourage their tenants to build compost sheds'); the tenants had come to realize the possibilities of collective action, partly as a result of their military experience, and after the Rice Riots they were conscious of the weakness of the police; the villages were near an industrial area and the tenants had the possibility, if they were forced off the land, of falling back on a job in the towns; bad feeling had earlier been caused by a landlord's attempt to make the tenants bear the cost of certain drainage works and reap the profit himself by selling the land; recent harbour works had deprived the tenants of seaweed on which they relied as fertilizer and hence added the expense of extra chemical fertilizer to their burdens; landlords refused repeated requests for a replanning of the inefficient drainage system and the building of new field paths, the lack of which was a great inconvenience in cultivation. Moreover, rents were high and the landlords were unwilling to make reductions. Theoretically there was a custom of crop-sharing in years of bad harvest; in the Tokugawa period 80 per cent was to go to the landlord and 20 per cent to the tenant, later the theoretical proportions had become 70 : 30, and from 1912 60 : 40, but in practice landlords had never agreed to accept less than 90 per cent of a normal year's rent. 'Since the war, however', says the report, 'tenants have no longer been content to give implicit obedience to the landlords as they had hitherto!'"<sup>20</sup>

The climate of increased democratic freedom created in Japan around 1925 was particularly favourable to the development of unions in areas hitherto untouched by the movement. One factor was the abrogation in 1925 of Articles 17 and 30 of the Public Order Police Law which had made labour activities illegal and justified police intervention against organising efforts. Also, pressure by the ILO, stimulated by countries that feared Japanese competition because of its very cheap labour, was helpful.<sup>21</sup>

Publicity regarding the appalling conditions of tenants, in some cases resembling forms of slavery if sons or daughters had to be given to servitude or prostitution to enable the parents to pay rent or interest, prepared national public opinion and shamed the landlords as a class.

Another reason why the movement spread widely was the high level of literacy among Japanese peasants, even the most isolated being acquainted with occurrences elsewhere in the country. In prefectures such as Niigata and Nagano, not directly linked with industrial centres, local leaders picked up the idea and started to organise their fellows.

20. Ibid., pp. 69-70 from: Nôshômuchô, Nômukyoku, Kosaku-sôgi ni kansuru Chôsa, Vol. I (1922), pp. 93-122, and Kyôchôkai, Nôsonka, Kosaku-sôgichi ni okeru Nôson Jijô no Henka (1928), pp. 49-61.

21. G.O.Totten, "Labour and Agrarian Disputes ...", op.cit., p. 192.

In other prefectures local buraku groups were organised by national or prefectural leaders appointed by the Nichin6. Thus, leader K.Aoki was nominated first to organise a buraku union in Miyakubo in Chiba prefecture and in 1926 was sent as secretary-general to Akita prefecture to organise buraku unions on a large scale.

The unions in Niigata prefecture were organised from 1923 onward mainly by Y.Ishida, the son of a poor tenant, who later became a national leader of the Nichin6.<sup>22</sup> In years of poor harvest, tenants had to borrow from moneylenders in order to pay the rent. The news of effective tenant action elsewhere against excessive rents in bad years had spread to Niigata, and Ishida initiated efforts to copy these actions in his own buraku. The strategy developed by trial and error in consultation with some of his fellows, reacting to landlords' opposition to demands for rent reduction. Landlords often tried to deal with individual tenants, refusing to negotiate with representatives. In reaction, tenants started to apply tactics of "collective bargaining en-masse" to emphasise their demands.

The tenants of a particular landlord, generally between 10 and 30, would hold a sit-in in front of his house, sometimes carrying posters to denounce him in public. Police intervention in favour of the landlords was one reason why such actions had to be organised on a larger scale. Demonstrations and large "address meetings" were organised, first secretly but later more openly, and large-scale sit-ins around the houses of the most prominent landlords, such as the president of their local union. Repression was often severe, leaders being jailed and tortured. They were accused of creating disorder, hindering public services, damaging property, or other pretexts. Landlords tried to evict tenants who joined in actions against them, causing the maintenance and security of tenancy to become a major demand. An increasing number of cases were brought before the courts but without much success.

The risks involved made the leaders ~~stand~~ stand out by their example and sacrifice. Ishida dedicated himself fully to organising activities while his wife cultivated his plot. First his own buraku was organised but later he visited other burakus in the same or surrounding villages. His struggle was particularly hard, Niigata prefecture being characterised by relatively large landholdings by Japanese standards. Six landlords each owned more than 1,000 hectares worked by thousands of tenants. Here there

22. Information supplied by Mr.Yuzen Ishida during several interviews.

was no paternalistic atmosphere typical of most smaller landholdings, where a strong personal bond existed between the landlord and his tenants.

In the campaign to spread the movement, those burakus were chosen where the most severe and acute problems existed. Great obstacles had to be overcome. Very large landowners were helped by police repression; smaller landowners used their traditional paternalistic control to pressure tenants against joining a union. Kin relationships, refreshments, favours and threats to force people to pay their debts, were used to pressure the tenants. These obstacles could only be overcome by the immediate organisation of a union. Potential activists (called org) had to be looked for in the burakus and a meeting organised with their help. Once a meeting was held it was essential to continue it until a union had been effectively created by the election of a president, vice-president and treasurer, and the payment of dues. Sometimes such meetings lasted a day and a night or even two days.

Tenants were made to realise the obstacles that they would have to face, and also that there would be no improvement should they succumb. It was emphasised that the pressure used by landowners and police showed their true character. Much attention was given in the discussions to successful tenant unions elsewhere in the country. The greatest difficulty was to get a first union organised in an area, after which others soon followed. Sometimes one union per buraku was formed, later amalgamating in a village federation (villages consist of several burakus). Sometimes one union was formed for a whole village. Soon 26 buraku units in 7 villages were able to form a federation of South Niigata. Later a prefectural federation for Niigata was created and Ishida became the head of the "struggle department". This federation joined the Nichinō.

Once a strong organisation existed, the struggle became more effective. Landlords took cases to court, defending their claims to rents based on their property rights. In one year there were as many as 600 such cases. Since the courts generally favoured the landlords, public opinion and local authorities had to be aroused through demonstrations or similar actions in order to shame or persuade the landlords into some form of concession or compromise. Psychological factors, so important in Japan, such as keeping-up appearances, avoiding shame, the desire for peaceful settlement rather than open conflict, were thus used by the organisations in favour of the tenants. Posters denouncing particularly abusive landlords or their lawyers were sometimes also effectively utilised.

When the movement had shown its strength in Niigata prefecture, Ishida went at times to the neighbouring Nagano prefecture, where contrasts were less serious, in order to guide the creation of peasant organisations there, or to Yamagata where conditions prevailed similar to those in Niigata (the Homma family had over 1,500 hectares of land).

In general, action in the villages or burakus was started in two ways. People would go to a prefectural federation and ask for an advisor to be sent to help them solve a problem or to organise a local union. The other approach was that leaders at the prefectural level would send one of their org people or would personally go to places where the existence of a dispute or problem had become known through the newspapers or local correspondents.

The latter approach, initiated from above as one might say, was applied in the creation of unions in Akita prefecture; this was undertaken in 1926 by K. Aoki who was sent as secretary-general of the federation of Nichinō in that prefecture. Aoki was a graduate from a horticultural high school but he joined the Nichinō out of social concern immediately after graduation. A year later, in 1926, he became secretary of the Tokyo Nichinō office; as such, he was sent to the Miyakubo buraku in Chiba prefecture to help solve a conflict that had arisen between 40 tenants and their landlord. The tenants were not organised, and the landlord had threatened to evict them from the lots they were cultivating since they could not pay the rent. Aoki persuaded the tenants to ~~plant~~ together two of the forty plots spread over the area of the buraku, the rest of which would remain uncultivated if the landlord carried out his threat. So many peasants worked on each plot that they were ready in two days. A meeting was then held in which the need for organisation was discussed and a union created. The show of organised power impressed the landlord who accepted the demand for exemption from rent for that year. This example drew wide attention and was repeated in other burakus from where people came to ask technical assistance. Direct action such as the en masse planting of paddy fields was followed by a meeting at which a union was formed and president, vice-president and treasurer elected. Soon, org people of the new unions helped their neighbouring burakus without needing direct assistance from the Tokyo office.

One effect of en masse cultivation of paddy fields was to impress those landlords who liked to maintain the image of being good "fathers" to their tenants. This referred particularly to the smaller landlords, the really large landowners being more difficult to tackle.

Aoki was later nominated secretary-general of the prefectural Nichinó federation in Akita and started to organise unions there. Again, burakus with the most serious problems were first approached. Of crucial importance when a leader from outside came to offer help to the peasants was to establish confidence and "status". This was done in various ways. Effective organisation of action to solve a serious problem, as described above for a buraku in Chiba prefecture, was one method. In Akita the approach was sometimes used by which a landlord was contacted and dealt with "without showing an inferiority complex". Peasants were impressed by this and prepared to follow such a leader in the creation of a union, backing him up if a show of bargaining power was needed in dealings with the landlord.<sup>23</sup>

The fact that a leader needed to prove himself as a person able to deal with landlords at an equal level was crucial in the context of Japanese rural society, as it is anywhere where patronage relationships predominate. In many areas in Japan a fictitious father-son, patron-client, or protector-protégé relationship (oyabun-kobun) predominated as a means of social control and to enforce conformity. This occurred principally in the relationship between small landowners and their tenants.<sup>24</sup> The patron (oyabun) went to considerable effort to maintain this system, beneficial to him, by acting as intermediary in the arrangement of marriages (nakódo). This imposed obligations on the landlord and gave physical and emotional security to the tenant, as long as the latter fulfilled his part of the obligations that might include certain forms of corvée when required by the landlord. Only a leader who really inspired confidence in the tenants, and was able to replace to some extent the emotional security of the oyabun-kobun relationship through personal charisma, was in a position to create a union.

Aoki proved himself on one occasion by dining ceremoniously at a landlord's house without showing signs of inferiority. The tenants followed the four-hour ceremony with the aid of the maids and formed a union

23. Interview with K.Aoki in Tokyo, 3-6-70.

24. T.Ushiomi, op.cit., pp. 56-78; pp. 77-78 noted: "On peut affirmer que dans les hameaux et villages qui comptaient de gros propriétaires avec quelques dizaines de ohobu (hectares), dont la séparation sociale d'avec la classe des fermiers était nettement tranchée, le contrôle économique a été tel que la parenté fictive n'avait pas de raison d'être. Tout camouflage devenait inutile."

immediately after Aoki had passed this "test".

Some of the more effective tenant union leaders were themselves members of landowning families. For example, Y.Kubota, former socialist peasant representative in the Diet (National Congress), during the 1920s organised a tenants' union in his home area in Nirayama, Shizuoka prefecture. His landowning family had fallen on bad times, but he had been able to study. After graduating from Tokyo University, he became a teacher at the Agricultural High School in Nirayama and organised the tenants against severe opposition. He was punished with army service in 1932, later being sent to Manchuria as a government official. In 1946 he returned to his village where he was elected mayor and later national representative.<sup>25</sup>

Many top leaders of Nichinō were university graduates and, in the context of Japanese rural society, this proved an advantage in their work as peasant leaders.<sup>26</sup>

The formation of a union generally went through the following stages: 1. the atmosphere of the buraku was studied and potential local leaders discovered who were prepared to stand up to the landlords; 2. meetings were held at which the need for organisation was explained, with examples from successful unions elsewhere; 3. the union was organised by the election of officials; 4. negotiations were opened with the landlords. Stages 3 and 4 were interchangeable. Stage 2 could in some cases take months because the inner structure of the buraku showed contrasts between traditionally-oriented leaders and potential new leaders, which could be utilised by the landlords. Members were therefore required to take the following pledges.

1. Never to attempt to obtain tenancy rights of land already cultivated by another member by offering a higher rent.
2. Never to accept a landlord's demand to return land without consulting the union.
3. Never to relinquish tenancy rights without informing the union and arranging for another member to take over the land.

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25. Interviews with former peasant union leaders and the wife of the late Y.Kubota in Nirayama. See also Keiji Kamiya and David E.Lindstrom, op.cit., pp. 59-62, where Nirayama is described as one of three cases of outstanding peasant organisation and community development effort, without emphasising, however, the importance of the pre-war political peasant struggle led by Y.Kubota as a preparation for later developments.

26. See G.O.Totten, The Social Democratic Movement, op.cit., pp. 151-70 for listings of the backgrounds of national peasant leaders.

4. Never to take over the tenancy of land from another member without his agreement.
5. On purchasing land at present leased to another member, not to attempt to terminate the tenancy for at least a year.<sup>27</sup>

In order to show bargaining power in negotiations, use was sometimes made of publicity and shame-imposing activities: payments of village taxes were delayed, schoolchildren went on strike en masse, rice cakes containing pictures of an objectionable landlord were distributed. These methods became famous through a dispute in Kisasi (Niigata prefecture). This was particularly spectacular because of the seppuku (shame-imposing form of suicide) committed by a leader of the union, and a fight with the police who came to evict tenants from invaded plots. Twenty-nine people were arrested. The case drew so much publicity that it formed the starting point for a nation-wide campaign for farming rights and security of tenure, a first step towards action in favour of land reform.

As peasant unions spread through the country and became better organised, the character of their demands changed. Initially, demands were mostly for postponement or reduction of rent payments in cases of bad harvest and emergency; later, demands for a permanent rent reduction of 30 percent were increasingly heard.<sup>28</sup> The number of disputes also increased over the years, as shown in Table 1. The way in which they were spread over the different prefectures is illustrated by Table 2, which clearly shows that disputes were initiated in the prefectures around industrial centres from where they spread to less urbanised areas north of Tokyo where owners of large estates were more frequent.

Landlords increasingly tried to evict peasants when they started to organise unions. The fact that more and more disputes were brought to the courts (rather than solved through negotiation) which generally ruled in favour of the landlords, made the peasant organisations more aware of the need for political action at the national level. Radical views on the need for drastic social structural change in order to improve the life of the peasants found increasingly positive response. The (leftist) Workers' and Peasants' Party, on the whole supported by the Nichinó (both undergoing parallel splits and mergers), won considerable influence during the 1928 elections for the Diet.

<sup>27</sup>. R.P.Dore, op.cit., p. 73.

<sup>28</sup>. Ibid., p. 78.

Table 1. Numbers of Farmer Disputes, Tenants and Landlords Involved, Tenant, Landlord, and Conciliation Unions and Membership, 1917-35

Year	Number of Occurrences	Number of Tenants Involved	Number of Landlords Involved	Tenant Unions		Landlord Unions		Conciliation Unions	
				Number	Membership (thousands)	Number	Membership (thousands)	Number	Membership (thousands)
1917	85	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
1918	256	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
1919	326	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
1920	408	34,605	5,236	352	-	-	-	-	-
1921	1,680	145,898	33,985	681	-	192	-	85	-
1922	1,578	125,750	29,077	1,114	-	247	-	176	-
1923	1,917	134,503	32,712	1,534	164	290	24	347	38
1924	1,532	110,920	27,223	2,337	235	414	32	542	84
1925	2,206	134,646	33,001	3,496	307	532	35	1,371	142
1926	2,751	151,061	39,705	3,926	347	605	41	1,491	165
1927	2,052	91,336	24,136	4,982	365	734	57	1,703	174
1928	1,866	75,136	19,474	4,353	330	695	56	1,909	190
1929	2,434	81,998	23,505	4,156	316	655	55	1,986	245
1930	2,478	58,562	14,159	4,208	301	640	53	1,980	-
1931	3,419	81,135	23,768	4,414	306	645	51	2,047	255
1932	3,414	61,499	16,706	4,650	297	662	50	2,098	259
1933	4,000	48,073	14,312	4,810	303	686	50	2,309	279
1934	5,828	121,031	34,035	4,390	276	633	49	2,219	272
1935	6,824	65,011	18,057	4,011	242	531	38	1,748	203

1) G. C. Totten, "Labor and Agrarian Disputes...", *op. cit.*, p. 203, from the following

Sources: Naikaku Tōkeikyoku, Rōdō Tōkei Yōran, 1932; Ōhara Shakai Mondai Kenkyūjo, Nihon Tōkei Nenkan, 1932-37; R. P. Dore, Land Reform in Japan, New York, 1959, p. 72.



Prefecture	1917	1918	1919	1920	1921	1922	1923	1924	1925	1926	1927	1928	1929	1930	1931	1932	1933	1934	1935	1936	1937	1938	1939	1940	1941
Hokkaido	—	—	—	4	7	15	8	6	7	15	41	32	79	128	151	218	242	337	338	376	346	248	177	200	198
Aomori	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	3	2	20	37	35	72	92	141	182	285	362	315	236	162	133	108
Iwate	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	2	1	1	2	—	7	3	11	31	37	76	50	57	52	28	58
Miyagi	—	1	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	2	10	10	13	35	79	66	58	114	209	369	308	177	88	114	178
Akita	—	—	—	—	—	2	10	13	6	10	38	109	192	162	226	260	299	487	471	207	353	239	290	210	193
Yamagata	—	—	—	—	—	2	6	8	10	28	33	84	122	215	205	217	345	274	245	300	370	248	330	275	131
Fukushima	—	—	—	4	—	1	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Ibaraki	—	1	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Tochigi	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Gunma	—	—	3	8	22	8	—	13	10	25	16	26	24	38	73	88	160	209	351	306	197	208	113	87	71
Saitama	—	—	3	8	23	18	—	13	19	35	43	57	64	54	127	101	121	108	136	232	217	64	46	62	71
Chiba	—	1	—	7	74	57	36	48	68	116	6	25	61	21	47	51	91	200	137	108	89	66	50	20	32
Tokyo	1	1	3	7	1	6	13	5	8	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Kanagawa	—	—	—	21	15	8	40	10	18	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Niigata	—	—	4	15	46	15	88	21	57	67	29	43	40	28	42	19	23	89	65	26	21	31	20	14	38
Toyama	3	—	2	2	25	40	20	21	69	212	151	93	143	167	169	148	185	193	240	207	172	95	64	16	5
Ishikawa	2	2	—	3	4	2	13	8	23	15	6	6	14	22	114	46	33	178	142	146	68	39	6	123	130
Fukui	1	—	2	2	5	2	5	7	13	11	13	4	3	17	11	29	39	18	33	11	25	14	4	8	24
Yamanashi	2	2	2	3	27	26	31	17	19	25	39	12	17	12	10	15	12	22	32	42	33	26	6	55	51
Nagano	—	—	9	12	18	41	45	49	43	39	38	53	86	144	150	139	133	126	460	613	503	373	271	178	213
Gifu	—	—	1	6	4	15	13	22	13	21	54	64	69	93	73	77	115	264	143	110	117	108	86	65	68
Shizuoka	24	55	120	69	47	6	7	11	250	191	153	99	89	69	144	80	73	64	113	105	122	111	49	48	125
Aichi	—	4	5	5	93	35	21	6	10	45	17	33	31	33	35	42	20	27	35	35	33	9	20	5	28
Mie	27	25	34	29	278	160	140	78	90	56	67	33	52	40	53	51	45	73	138	57	61	34	55	33	29
Kyoto	2	1	3	8	27	27	36	37	166	45	111	79	151	88	152	149	111	192	198	232	195	160	91	67	40
Shiga	—	4	3	1	—	2	57	18	22	34	17	30	24	45	44	63	37	214	104	60	63	83	49	48	40
Osaka	1	3	9	47	242	111	306	348	258	384	180	201	152	86	90	63	79	135	213	165	158	149	69	59	57
Hyogo	5	8	73	67	415	335	472	263	231	395	196	93	120	99	173	98	75	208	138	157	167	148	109	87	80
Nara	4	25	8	3	7	15	20	43	209	143	74	43	36	66	72	112	90	179	102	128	45	19	35	92	
Wakayama	1	5	1	1	101	66	47	18	53	65	48	41	47	57	49	34	101	84	66	39	48	47	27	24	21
Tottori	2	3	1	5	10	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Shimane	—	—	2	3	5	3	9	24	67	78	75	46	41	43	27	37	81	88	73	64	53	58	51	40	
Okayama	—	56	11	22	32	100	55	18	55	30	39	35	58	37	67	73	94	180	339	217	217	106	63	41	46
Hiroshima	—	4	6	5	15	61	38	19	11	12	15	14	27	28	37	41	59	85	84	72	73	41	49	93	58
Yamaguchi	1	2	—	1	8	4	4	19	20	21	25	16	32	24	34	39	35	70	77	73	31	21	38	31	24
Tokushima	—	3	—	3	26	66	26	26	56	41	27	32	50	44	85	129	157	198	171	245	145	119	73	84	118
Kagawa	1	2	5	4	10	59	61	86	52	65	50	8	20	28	52	71	87	92	109	158	139	113	90	49	84
Ehime	6	—	—	2	22	34	35	42	13	33	27	16	16	32	23	33	20	31	44	24	28	26	28	11	48
Kochi	—	3	—	2	1	—	—	—	—	2	15	3	14	22	33	58	44	58	50	50	47	59	44	41	62
Fukuoka	—	18	10	14	22	55	115	81	227	116	125	75	88	126	159	192	193	234	248	207	252	117	144	148	144
Saga	—	18	—	1	17	16	12	13	5	4	13	25	17	22	44	36	50	74	134	87	68	51	57	15	59
Nagasaki	—	2	1	1	—	2	2	2	2	2	1	15	8	9	9	21	7	17	33	25	23	12	10	1	10
Kumamoto	1	—	1	3	16	107	45	21	13	11	4	2	4	10	4	4	1	19	41	73	78	40	47	61	46
Oita	—	7	—	1	2	9	7	8	2	2	—	—	—	1	4	5	9	3	17	34	23	51	50	51	92
Miyazaki	—	—	—	2	5	23	12	4	9	12	24	17	11	22	18	12	14	22	28	49	22	21	16	3	41
Kagoshima	—	—	1	1	2	3	—	4	1	1	1	7	—	1	15	18	42	141	204	133	119	113	80	78	42
Okinawa	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	2	—	—
Total	85	256	326	408	1,660	1,578	1,917	1,532	2,266	2,751	2,652	1,865	2,434	2,478	3,419	3,414	4,066	5,828	6,834	6,894	6,137	4,618	3,575	3,168	3,388

Source: Nōchi Seido Shiryō Shūsei Hensan Iinkai (Editorial Committee for the Collection of Materials on the Land System). Nōchi Seido Shiryō Shūsei (Collection of Materials on the Land System), Vol. II, Kosaku Sōgi ni kansuru Shiryō (Materials on Tenants' Disputes). Ochanomizu Shōbō, Tokyo, 196). pp. 268-279.

The government, alarmed by the rising tide of radicalism in the peasant and labour movement, ordered nationwide arrests of movement leaders in the so-called 3-15 event (March 15, 1928). This was a serious blow to the Nichinó, most of its top leaders at national and some prefectural levels being imprisoned. Some, such as national leader Tokuda, remained in jail until after World War II.

One result of the mass arrests was that moderate groups which had split with the main organisation and the remaining Nichinó leadership again merged into one large organisation. On May 27, 1928, the National Peasants' Union (Zenkoku Nōmin Kumiai, abbreviated: Zennō) was formed, but soon split again into factional divisions. Another mass arrest of relatively radical leaders took place on April 16, 1929 (the 4-16 event), practically destroying several of the prefectural federations of Nichinó and Zennō.<sup>29</sup> In some prefectures, these events also had considerable effect on the voting pattern of peasants, their most popular leaders being in jail.

However, local action continued in spite of increasing difficulties, showing how strongly the needs and demands of the tenants were felt. Dore observed:

"At the local level police frequently intervened in disputes, sometimes with an objective fair-mindedness which operated to the tenants' advantage, but generally there is no doubt that their powers were mobilized in the landlord's interest. Many disputes ended when exasperated peasants resorted to threats of violence which immediately brought police sanctions on their heads. Sobered into a shamefaced sense of their own presumptuous daring, they were soon reduced to a mood of compliant submission. Police rights of arbitrary search - for subversive literature - and of arrest and questioning were regularly used as a means of intimidation, while associations which were deemed to have dangerous tendencies were ordered to be dissolved."<sup>30</sup>

Leaders such as Yuzen Ishida still show the marks of torture to which they were subjected during their many imprisonments.

Surprisingly enough, despite adverse conditions at national and local levels, the tenancy disputes waged by local unions, whether or not affiliated to Nichinó or other organisations, decreased but little. This is perhaps an indication that the peasant movement had taken strong roots and was not easy to repress.

The changes taking place in rural areas were all the more surprising since in addition to simple repression several other means were used to

29. For a description of the ups and downs of peasant organisations as political groups in these years see G.O. Totten, The Social Democratic Movement ..., op.cit., p. 345 ff.

30. R.P. Dore, op.cit., p. 84.

oppose, control or neutralise tenant actions. Landlords formed their own unions, which increased rapidly during the second half of the 1920s, to coordinate activities against tenant demands. (see Table 1).

Peasant unions which urged radical change in the rural social structure had the wind taken out of their sails by "conciliation unions", generally created by landlords or the police whenever a conflict threatened. Some concessions were made, landlords often being persuaded to do so by the local authorities, and tenants and landlords were brought together in one organisation. As shown by Table 1, the number of conciliation unions grew and by 1934 included almost as many members as the tenant unions.<sup>31</sup>

In this context, it should be emphasised again that in Japan the tradition of harmonious relationships, conciliation and compromise is strongly embedded. Moreover, in many areas the contrast between landlords and tenants was not sharp. Numerous tenants were also part-owners and many landlords had relatively small estates. This is shown by the many landlords who were involved in the disputes, averaging about 1 to every 4 tenants and also contributed to the frequency of conciliatory solutions. To quote Dore again:

"...in the close community organisation of the geographically concentrated hamlet, with all its mechanisms of gift-giving and labour exchange to maintain harmonious relations, the familistic atmosphere made open conflict truly internecine and for that reason emotionally difficult to support. To the tenant born and bred in such a community, neighbourhood ties inevitably took precedence over class ties."<sup>32</sup>

Only in areas where large landownings were more frequent, landlords having tens or even hundreds of tenants, as in the prefectures of Niigata and Yamagata, did the conflict between landlords and tenants have overtones of class struggle and the leftist wing of Nichinō maintained its strongholds.

Leftist political action in the rural areas, emphasising class struggle and radical solutions to tenant problems, became increasingly difficult after 1928 and particularly after 1931. In September 1931 the Manchuria incident took place: an explosion engineered by the Armed Forces near Mukden and used as a pretext for the occupation of Manchuria. This action considerably increased the authoritarian tendency of the Japanese

31. G.O.Totten, "Labour and Agrarian Disputes...", op.cit., p. 206.

32. R.P.Dore, op.cit., p. 79.

government and the influence of the Armed Forces. It was noted for the period 1932-37:

"On the domestic scene, this was the period of 'government by assassination', during which the military, supported by like-minded civilians and chauvinistic organisations, steadily encroached on all areas of government at the expense of the moderates, the political parties and the press..."<sup>33</sup>

The peasant unions as national or prefectural organisations were also affected. At the local level, tenant action against landlords for more favourable conditions continued, but at the national level the emphasis was laid more strongly on the demand for a greater share in the distribution of the national income for agriculture as a whole, for landowners as well as tenants. As Dore noted, the moderate leaders who remained after the radical peasant leaders had disappeared...

"were more inclined for reasons of ideology as well as of expediency to shift emphasis from tenant demands to farmer demands, which had the support also of the army and could claim as their justification not the promptings of alien ideologies but the need to preserve the integrity of the countryside as the guardian of truly Japanese virtues."<sup>34</sup>

Another trend that came up in these years, and that was directly related to the Manchuria Incident and the growing influence of the military, was the revival of patriotic unity and the emphasis of truly Japanese values.

However, the tendency to emphasise the common interests of all people engaged in farming was partly a consequence of the economic depression of the early 1930s. The government undertook certain measures to stabilise rice prices. In order to tackle in part the rapidly growing problem of indebtedness, a Debt Clearance Unions Law was enacted in 1933 and the formation of special unions to help poor farmers clear their debts was stimulated. This law gave local authorities responsible for its execution considerable control over the lives of the peasants involved. The village self-help movement or Village Rehabilitation Movement, started in 1932, was another means through which to bring rural people into line with national policies. Agricultural Cooperatives were strengthened and regulated to make participation more attractive to poor peasants and at the same time were used as a means to mobilise the productive capacity of the rural

33. John M. Maki, Government and Politics in Japan (London, 1962), p. 25.

34. Ronald P. Dore, "The Socialist Party and the Farmers" in Allan B. Cole, George O. Totten and Cecil H. Uehara, Socialist Parties in Postwar Japan (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1966), Ch. 11, p. 371.

population. Sentimental appeals to the glorification of the Japanese Peasant's Soul were part of this process which Dore called "the totalitarian solution".<sup>35</sup> Summarising he noted:

"By and large the result of all these administrative innovations was to strengthen the old landlord-dominated order of the villages. It was the landlords, or in their absence the more prosperous owner-farmers, who dominated the Co-operatives and the new Rehabilitation Committees as they dominated the Agricultural Associations and the Village Councils already."<sup>36</sup>

It is striking that in spite of all these measures the number of disputes continued to increase. Most tenancy disputes were now apparently waged by local buraku groups, independent of any direct support by a national peasant or political organisation. Statistics collected for the years in which the broader organisations suffered severe repression show this clearly. Of the 3,419 disputes reported in 1931, only 1,414 were sponsored by any national peasant or political organisation; in 1932 it was 1,268 out of 3,414, and in 1935 only 1,351 out of 6,824,<sup>37</sup> indicating that peasants in many areas were acting on their own behalf without any political support. Not until the war against China started in 1937 did the number of disputes start to decline; however, despite the dissolution of all peasant unions in 1939, 3,308 disputes were reported in 1941.<sup>38</sup>

This shows how serious the land tenure situation was and makes it understandable that efforts to propose reform legislation were on many occasions undertaken by the more enlightened politicians, albeit in vain. It prepared the way before and during World War II for the land reform finally carried out in 1946. As Dore noted:

"The unions' activity, their success in formalising the lines of conflict and bringing it into the open, contributed to a growing awareness of the 'problem of the villages' which eventually prompted the Ministry of Agriculture officials to draft a comprehensive land reform at a time when

35. For a detailed description of this period see R.P.Dore, Land Reform in Japan, op.cit., Ch. IV, "The Totalitarian Solution".

36. Ibid., p. 104.

37. Nōchi-Seido Shiryō Shūsei Hensan Iinkai (Editorial Committee for the Collection of Material on the Land System), Nōchi-Seido Shiryō Shūsei (Collection of Material on the Land System), Vol. II (Materials concerning Tenant Disputes), (Tokyo: Ochanomizu Shobō, 1969), pp. 362-65.

38. R.P.Dore, op.cit., p. 72.

they could still believe that Japan would win the War against America, not lose it in total and paralysing defeat."<sup>39</sup>

The disposition of some government circles toward land reform came out in a plan drafted by a section of the Ministry of Agriculture in 1942. This advocated the redistribution of 1,978,000 hectares of land over a period of 25 years in order to transform tenants into owner-cultivators.<sup>40</sup> However, this plan did not become official policy.

In the following years, however, some independent and relatively isolated local reform movements took place in large landowner-dominated areas. In 1942-43, in Niigata prefecture where the radical agrarian movement had its main stronghold, particularly in the Naka-Kambara county, landlords had to give in to tenant pressures to sell their land. Niigata, an important rice producing area, was crucial for the country's food supply and the government, intent on getting maximum rice production, was willing to support the demands of those who actually farmed the land against those who only received the rents. Many pre-war union leaders were active in their burakus in this respect, although the unions as such had officially disappeared. On the whole, the sales were not favourable to the landlords, since they had to deposit their receipts in the Industrial Cooperative in their village; at that time, this was a means through which the government controlled agricultural activities.<sup>41</sup>

The war effort brought complete control from above of all activities in the rural areas, organised particularly through the system of Industrial (agricultural) Cooperatives reformed to this effect in 1943 and renamed "Agricultural Associations". The system of landlord-dominated agricultural cooperatives that had existed under different names and legislative regulations since about 1900 was thus brought under complete government control. Membership was obligatory for all farmers. A principal function was the compulsory collection and storage of rice for the government's food supply programme.

After the dissolution of peasant unions in 1939, a Federation for the reform of the Land System was created by the social-democrat, R.Hirano.

39. R.P.Dore, "On Learning to Live with the Second Best", Economic and Political Weekly, Bombay, November 8, 1969, p. 1783.

40. T.Furushima, Nempó Nogyó Hyakunen (A Century of Agriculture), Chronological Tables (Tokyo, 1967), pp. 51-52.

41. Information supplied by Prof.T.Furushima who did field work in Niigata in 1946.

This Federation pretended not to be a class organisation and remained active until 1942, when it was also dissolved. After that year, practically no organisations were left to defend peasant interests. The only representation was through the 13 members of the Diet who, with certain sections of the Ministry of Agriculture, continued to press for improvement of land tenure legislation. After 1942, some of these Diet members, including Hirano, maintained clandestine contact with local peasant groups that formerly belonged to the federations. As Diet members they were in contact with their electorate, although meetings and publications were forbidden and local groups leaders were often arrested. The numbers of tenancy disputes in those years were not officially reported, but were probably the same as in earlier years.<sup>42</sup>

Immediately after the war, efforts were undertaken to reorganise the Socialist Party and the former Nichinō peasant unions related to it. These efforts were facilitated by the fact that organisations at the buraku level had not been entirely stamped out, despite government repression. Former leaders, some returning from prison, others from work in outlying areas related to the Japanese war effort or occupation, found their one-time followers ready to be re-activated. En masse bargaining with landlords over rent reduction and other problems was once again the order of the day.

After the left-wing political parties had been reorganised, the Japanese Peasant Union (Nichinō) was re-formed on February 9, 1946 with Socialists, Social-Democrats and Communists working together in the new organisation. The most crucial issue to be tackled was the pending land reform.

In 1938 an Agricultural Land Adjustment Law had been passed by the Diet, partly under pressure of the many tenancy disputes. On December 4, 1945 a Revision of the Agricultural Land Adjustment Law was presented to the Diet, proposing that within five years about 1,500,000 hectares of land be transferred to owner-farmers, including all tenanted land of absentee landowners and part of the land of resident landowners. The latter were to be allowed to hold 5 cho of tenanted land.<sup>43</sup> This Revision was passed by the Diet but was considered inadequate by many circles, and failed to obtain the approval of the Supreme Commander for the Allied Powers (SCAP). The stipulation that tenanted land would be affected caused many landlords,

42. Information supplied by Mr. R.Hirano in an interview, July 1970.

43. 1 cho = 0.9917 hectare.

resident or absentee, to try to get rid of their tenants and to take back tenanted lands. 250,000 such cases were estimated to have taken place between August 1945 and May 1946. Problems arising around this issue had adverse effects on food supplies to the cities, with the result that on 12 May 1946 a Foodstuff Mayday was organised in Tokyo, at which 300,000 people demonstrated in front of the Imperial Palace.<sup>44</sup>

On 9 December, 1945 the General Headquarters of the Allied Forces issued a strong memorandum in favour of radical change in the rural areas, including land reform, and giving 15 March, 1946 as a deadline to the Japanese government for the presentation of an appropriate plan. The new plan proposed lowering the ceiling for resident landowners' holdings to 3 cho. Again, this was not considered sufficient by the SCAP. Finally, on October 21, 1946 the Owner-Farmer Establishment Special Measures Law and the Revised Agricultural Land Adjustment Law were promulgated, limiting the amount of tenanted land that a landowner could maintain to one cho.<sup>45</sup> This enabled drastic restructuring of Japanese rural society, practically eliminating the overwhelming power and influence of the landlords.

Former and radical peasant union leaders as well as government officials admit that the land reform programme as it was finally executed was in large part the result of pressure by GHQ. It is also recognised that GHQ support enabled the rapid revival of the peasant organisations which also pressured for the reform. The campaign to revive the former tenant unions spread rapidly and by 1947 the Nichinó had about 1,270,000 members organised throughout the country.<sup>46</sup>

In the post-war years, pressure exercised by the peasant organisations was particularly felt in relation to implementation of the land reform. As we have noted, when the first official steps regarding possible land reform were taken, the landlords started to evict tenants from their land in order to diminish the number of hectares that they would have to sell to the government for transfer to tenants. In defence against such actions, tenants organised en masse negotiations. This was not easy as the local police generally favoured the landlords.<sup>47</sup> There were also the traditional

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44. Masaru Kajita, Land Reform in Japan (Agricultural Development Series, No. 2, Tokyo, 1959), pp. 28-30.

45. Ibid.

46. Ibid.

47. Interview with Mr. T. Matsuzawa, Diet member and representative from Niigata prefecture.



psychological barriers against opposing the landlord's desire. As Dore noted:

"Tenants conditioned to listen to their landlord's instructions with respectful bows could not easily make the psychological break with their past which an outright refusal to return the land would require. Moreover, self-preservation often dictated compliance. Many depended on the landlord's permission to cut firewood and green fertilizer from his forest land. Reliance on the landlord's benevolence in times of acute economic distress was the only form of social security many tenants knew. Such a source of actual and potential benefits could not easily be offended, particularly in the uncertainties of the early stages of the reform when peasants, congenitally sceptical of all the actions of authority, could never be sure that today's law which promised to turn them into owner-farmers might not be replaced by a new one tomorrow which threatened to make them tenants again."<sup>48</sup>

The strength of the landlords' influence can be estimated from the fact that, of 250,000 cases in which landlords tried to reclaim land from tenants, only 23,000 were disputed. To give some form of protection to the tenants, land reform legislation provided that the approval of the Agricultural Land Committee was needed for the return of tenanted land to the owner. These Committees were established in each village and town (municipality) as part of the 1938 Agricultural Land Adjustment Law, with members nominated by the prefectural governor. The Revised Agricultural Land Adjustment Law of October 1946 stipulated that these committees should be elected and consist of 3 landowner representatives, 2 owner-farmer representatives and 5 tenant representatives. Peasant organisations played a particularly important role in the constitution of these village committees. Where peasants had strong and militant organisations, tenant representatives could be elected who would not merely conform to the traditional pattern of landlord rule. In a good many cases, the important position of committee president was filled by a tenant if the tenant representatives as a group within the committee were well-coordinated and not too easily intimidated.

The role of the Agricultural Land Committees was crucial in the land reform process. Several conflicts of interest between landlords and tenants regarding the land reform process had to be decided by the Land Committees; for that reason, it was important whether such committees were tenant or landlord-dominated. As Dore observed:

"Control over eviction was the touchstone of a Land Committee's efficiency. Where it was loose other abuses generally followed. Landlords who could use the threat of eviction freely were able to exact high black-market payments from the tenants whom they 'allowed' to enjoy the benefits of the law. Even if eviction was kept within limits, where landlord-dominated Committees allowed landlords freely to choose which plots of land they would

48. R.P.Dore, Land Reform in Japan, op.cit., p. 151.

retain as their 1 cho allotment, the same effect could be achieved. In tenant-dominated Committees, on the other hand, landlords who attempted such blandishments were given short shrift."<sup>49</sup>

The whole reform effort had an important mobilising function in the rural areas, as one field observer noted:

"The method by which the land reform programme was carried out constitutes an important adult educational programme, perhaps one of the most significant adult educational efforts ever launched. The purchases and resales of the land were made by village commissions -- nearly 10,600 generally independent and highly responsible groups of 10 members each. Half of the members of each commission were farm tenants."<sup>50</sup>

Initially, before the new land reform law became effective, the Land Committees were constituted without proper elections. The fact that administrative villages, at which level the Land Committees had to be created, often consisted of ten or even more burakus (hamlets), complicated the constitution of the committees since each buraku wanted to be represented. Considerable negotiation between the burakus and the landlords, owner-farmers and tenants was necessary to make up the committee. Where peasants were well-organised they could be sure of getting committee members to represent their interests. In other cases, traditional buraku "bosses", often landlords, would dominate.<sup>51</sup>

Chances for appropriate tenant representation improved after elections of Municipal (village) Agricultural Land Committees were held in conformity with the land reform law in 1947. However, in only a few prefectures was the number of tenant chairmen of committees larger than the number of landlord chairmen. In 32 out of 46 prefectures, committee chairmen were predominantly landlords, in 8 prefectures they were predominantly owner-farmers and in only 6 prefectures had tenants the highest number of chairmanships. In the country as a whole, 24.8 percent of the chairmen of Agricultural Land Committees were tenants, 39.1 percent were landlords and 34.5 percent owner-farmers, the rest being independent

49. Ibid., p. 153.

50. Arthur F. Raper, "Some Recent Changes in Japanese Village Life", Rural Sociology, 16, No. 1, March 1951, p. 12.

51. Nochi Kaikaku Kiroku Iinkai (Committee to Record the Rural Land Reform): Nochi Kaikaku Tenmatsu Gaiyo (Outline of the Results of Rural Land Reform), Tokyo, p. 510.

outsiders.<sup>52</sup>

Landlord influence thus continued to be strong, even in prefectures where tenants were well-organised, perhaps due to the fact that buraku loyalty was often stronger than class loyalty. As we have mentioned, however, most landlords were not really large landholders, almost 75 percent of those who were Municipal Agricultural Land Committee members owning less than 5 hectares.<sup>53</sup>

Another indication of the scarcity of large landowners was that during the whole land reform process only 1,000 had to sell more than 50 hectares of the 2,062,000 affected. By August 1, 1950 a total of 1,742,000 hectares of cultivated land had been purchased from their previous owners and transferred to 4,478,000 tenants or owner-tenants.<sup>54</sup>

In the overall reform process up to 1949, about 560,000 cases arose in which landlords demanded the return of part of their land so that it would not be affected by the reform. Of these, 147,000 were disputed, little more than half not being granted to the landlords; 25 percent were solved in a way which gave satisfaction to both parties and the rest were awarded to the landlords.<sup>55</sup> There was increasing pressure to dispute landlord demands in the period when peasant unions were gaining strength. Prior to May 1946 only 10 percent of demands for repossession of land were disputed.

On the whole, the traditional Japanese approach of seeking compromise and harmony seemed to prevail once the reform machinery, set in motion by the SCAP, properly functioned. There was but little class struggle. As Dore noted:

"The 'tenants-first' view, or what might also be called the 'class view' of the land reform, was that which coloured the attitude of the Occupation and also of the leftwing political parties, the farmers' unions, and the leftwing academic writers who frequently deplored the extent of tenant dispossession. But it was not the predominant one in the villages. In all aspects of the reform, hamlet solidarity, with its generally hierarchical

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52. Agricultural Land Department, Sanko Shiryo (Reference Materials), Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry, Nov. 1947, mimeo., Table 9, p. 14.

53. Nochi Kaikaku etc., op.cit., p. 513.

54. T.Ogura, Agrarian Problems and Agricultural Policy in Japan (Tokyo: The Institute of Asian Economic Affairs, 1967), pp. 21-22.

55. R.P.Dore, Land Reform in Japan, op.cit., p. 165.

pattern and its traditional emphasis on the harmony of the hamlet, operated to clog, or if one prefers to lubricate, the process of transferring the land from owner to cultivator."<sup>56</sup>

Almost no violence occurred during the reform. During negotiations and the reaching of final compromises at the local level, peasants and others gained valuable experience:

"The purchase and resale of the land was a tedious and involved transaction. In one village, characterized by longtime paddy farming, 11,000 pieces of land were involved; in another, 4,000; and in another, 2,000.

A number of people in addition to the tenant members of the commissions received valuable on-the-ground adult leadership experience, including the clerks who prepared the transactions for the commission's consideration and the buraku representative who often worked out the details of purchase and resale in his locality. With an average of at least three clerks per commission and not less than a half dozen buraku representatives, it means that 15 to 20 men in each village -- a national total of 150,000 to 200,000 -- had participated in this unique leadership experience, and that about a third of these were from the farm-tenant group who in the old tenure system could hardly have hoped to perform as leaders. So, quite aside from the benefits which the new owners secured from the land purchased, the way the transfers were carried out has in a short time produced a sizable group of potential new leaders in Japanese villages."<sup>57</sup>

It is not surprising that as many as 25 percent of landlords' demands for repossession were disputed. As the case studies presented by Dore indicate, this is probably due to the support of the growing peasant unions which had an important educational function.

Japanese Peasant Union leaders have emphasised that one of their main tasks after the War was to guide tenants in defending their interests through the Agricultural Land Committees.<sup>58</sup> Particularly around the generally recognised demand for effective land reform, the peasant union movement was united and could show considerable force.

Later, other issues divided the ranks of the unions, particularly in the case of government food requisitioning. The Socialist Party, which depended heavily on peasant support, criticised this policy which, in several cases, left the farmer with insufficient rice for his own family. On the other hand, the urban electorate, anxious to get as much rice as possible at the cheapest prices, favoured the government policy. At the

56. Ibid., p. 166.

57. Arthur F. Raper, op.cit., p. 13.

58. Interviews with several union leaders.

Second Convention of Nichinó in February 1947, controversy over this issue was strong and a group headed by R.Hirano and considered the right wing of Nichinó, split off. Later, when the Socialist Party tried to head a coalition government, the Communist wing of Nichinó became more and more critical; since the Socialist leaders were tied to government policies, the Communists won increasing support from local groups. Soon, however, the factional struggle within the Nichinó and the several leftist parties caused the majority of members to become indifferent. The main reason for this, however, was that the issues that caused peasant protest right after the war had been gradually solved. As Dore noted:

"Many of the immediate postwar leaders of local farmers' union branches -- and this was a potent factor in the union's decline -- had by then been elected to positions of administrative responsibility in land committees and village assemblies and had lost interest in the mere organisation of movements of protest. Moreover, the immediate issues which had provided a powerful impetus to the organisation of local 'struggles' had lost some of their urgency. With an easing of the food situation, the government's requisitioning programme began to press less heavily on the farmer; smaller delivery quotas were imposed for the harvest of 1948 than for the year before, despite a considerably larger yield. By the end of 1948 the land reform programme was well under way. Landlords' efforts to repossess land as an attempt to evade the reform were largely an immediate postwar phenomenon which had later ceased to provide a common motif for struggles. The demands for democratisation of the agricultural associations had been answered with the establishment of a new system of agricultural cooperatives. Only demonstrations against heavy tax assessments remained as the chief staple of local activity."<sup>59</sup>

It seems that, while during the pre-war and immediate post-war years the grassroot peasant organisations showed considerable activity in relation to strongly felt local issues, the national level organisation suffered setbacks because of government repression; after 1948, the national level organisation remained politically active but the base organisations lost interest. Once locally felt problems and grievances had been solved or were in the course of being solved, it became difficult to mobilise the peasants for protest or other political action. In fact, they were gradually transformed into "farmers".<sup>60</sup>

59. In Allan B.Cole, George O.Totten and Cecil H.Uyehara, op.cit., p. 386.

60. In a personal communication, Prof.Dore indicated that after the War it became increasingly appropriate to translate the name of Nichino, Nihon Nomin Kumiai, as Japanese Farmers' Union as G.O.Totten generally does, while before the war Japanese Peasants' Union was more to the point.

When more than 4,000,000 tenants had been transformed into small owners and government rice requisitioning became less severe, the only issue left to pre-occupy the farmers was that of control of rice prices. Although the Nichinō and some smaller farmers' organisations applied political pressure at the national level for a rice price favourable to the farmers, it was particularly the Central Union of Agricultural Cooperatives which tried to protect farmers' interests in this respect. This Union succeeded the Industrial Cooperatives and Agricultural Associations which existed prior and during the War and were re-structured along more democratic lines in 1947. Rice-marketing had been traditionally a main function of this organisation, on which it depended heavily for its income; defence of the rice price thus became naturally one of its tasks. Political divisions and the lack of strongly felt needs or issues around which to rally the farmers were the main reasons for the declining influence of farmer unions after 1950.<sup>61</sup>

#### Concluding remarks

In comparison with organisations in other countries, peasant organisations as they developed in Japan have some outstanding characteristics.

- (1) They were initiated in areas in which the modernising influence of growing cities and industry was strong. When developments resulting from this influence proved disadvantageous to the peasants, or left their growing expectations unfulfilled, the willingness to organise to defend their own interests became strong.
- (2) The Japanese organisations were led or even initiated by non-peasants or by peasants who had had ample experience as industrial workers in the big cities. At the stage when the movement spread and took on regional or national proportions, intellectual support and leadership became crucial.
- (3) An important obstacle was the paternalistic control through emotional ties and patronage of landlords over tenants. This was overcome when organisation leaders were able to take up a similar role, inspiring some admiration and loyalty among the peasants.

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61. Information supplied by Dr. N.Imamura and interviews with several cooperative directors.

(4) Organisations were not built up around overall issues such as land reform but around concrete grievances and demands that were strongly felt at the local level. If these demands were not sufficiently fulfilled and the tenants strengthened their organisation, more radical means of struggle were applied such as mass demonstrations, sit-ins, strikes, action against strike breakers, en-masse cultivation of unwilling landlords' land, etc. With the growing strength of peasant organisations, broader issues such as improvement of legislation protecting tenants' rights, better overall tenancy rates and land reform, were taken up as demands. A similar process of escalating the means of struggle as well as the demands has been noted in peasant movements elsewhere.<sup>62</sup>

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62. Occasional Papers on peasant organisations in the Philippines and Indonesia are under preparation by the author.

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