

No1. Report

A Short History of Zengakuren, Japanese Student Movement

March 4, 2010

Brothers and sisters! We'd like to thank you for inviting us to join your vigorous struggle and for receiving us so warmly in the midst of the busy days. I'm convinced that our encounter with you, fighting students and workers of UC Berkeley, proud of the long history of militant struggle, happened not by chance but by necessity because we in Japan and the US have been fighting the same struggle against the common enemy quite simultaneously. In a word, we are comrades. This is the significant first step in forging international solidarity. We fully realize the importance of this opportunity and are firmly determined to develop our solidarity further.

Our fundamental and practical standpoint of looking back on our history

My theme today is to tell you the history of Zengakuren, Japanese student movement. I'd like to develop my speech from the viewpoint of clarifying our task and problem in today's Japan, not simply looking back on the history.

We are confronted now all over the world with a common task to fight back neo-liberal offensive, that is, a desperate attempt of imperialism in deepening crisis to carry out war, reactionary revision of the Constitution (or the existing ruling system and method), privatization and union busting. An overall destruction of employment, social security, education and other social institutions is the aim and content of neo-liberalism. These outrageous attacks are awakening working class all over the world to rise up for struggle. As neo-liberalism is an unavoidable choice for capitalist system, the struggle against it never ends till the whole world is fundamentally changed.

Hosei University, our battlefield in Tokyo, has been totally transformed into an instrument of money making, in which a huge amount of debt is imposed on students by expensive fee and dissident students who seek justice and liberty on campus are persecuted by arrest and punishment in the name of "education". Arrests of 118 students in the past four years, however, didn't make us retreat in our consistent struggle.

We have learned through our own experiences that students as well as workers have tremendous power to overcome every kind of difficulties when they are only united. And there can be no other way to achieve unity than to confront adversities resolutely without hesitation. We have also learned that struggle helps us work out fundamental policy and obtain understanding of the world and the era necessary to carry out our movement. It is only through actual struggle that political leadership is born to materialize this orientation. We must be aware that every student and worker has the ability to achieve this task without exception. The victory of a struggle depends entirely upon if the leadership can resolutely face difficulties, fully convinced on these principles, putting confidence upon fellow students as well as workers. My conviction is that only the united power of people can change the history. It is the underlying implication of the whole arguments.

The global economic crisis is before us. It's our age. In 1930's, the age of the Great Depression of 1929, though the large-scale unemployment and imperialist war urged workers and students to rise up for a world-wide struggle, international workers' movement as well as student movement were terribly defeated by the New Deal in the US and Nazism in Germany and ended up in being

mobilized into the world war. This defeat is essentially due to the betrayal of Stalinism that transformed revolutionary Russia, the bastion of socialist world revolution.

We are now at the historical crossroad and our revolutionary practice is tested if we allow to repeat the tragedy of history once again or to make a giant leap forward of our history. To meet this serious demand, we need revitalization of militant and powerful labor unions and student mass organizations, or students' autonomous bodies and at the same time construction of a workers' party as political leadership of these mass movements. Realizing this task, we once again confirm that the history of Zengakuren is an effort of building up a genuine leadership through organizing mass rising of students.

(1) Zengakuren was born as a result of the students' general strike against war and privatization

The defeat of postwar revolution: general strike of February 1st, 1947, frustrated

The collapse of Japanese imperialism in World War II, declared on August 15th, 1945, triggered a stormy upsurge of movement of Japanese working class and students who were liberated from the spell of Tenno-sei (Emperor system) Bonapartism. Labor unions were organized one after another across the nation mostly under the political leadership of Japan Communist Party (JCP). Workers began to control the production in face of sabotage of bourgeois everywhere in postwar Japan and labor movement rapidly and massively developed to the climax of February 1st, 1947, when a general strike was planned. To confront these mighty developments, General Headquarters (GHQ) of US occupation forces ordered the ban on strike and the planned general strike was suddenly suspended. JCP leaders who had been claiming that the US occupation forces was a liberator totally gave in to the strike ban and the general strike was aborted. It is the day that marked the defeat of the postwar revolution of Japan.

Founding of Zengakuren (All Japan Federation of Students' Autonomous Bodies)

The postwar Japanese student movement started just in the midst of the general feeling of frustration after the failure of the general strike. Students demanded first of all the expulsion of the professors who had played criminal role in the past imperialist war and the rehabilitation of the progressive professors who, on the contrary, had been expelled from universities during the wartime because of their independent thought. This movement meant a struggle to take back the campus as well as student dormitories from the rule of the military and rightwing direction and to recover academic independence and liberty. The second major subject of their struggle was to defend and reconstruct education, including demand of expenditure for repairing damaged university buildings in the wartime. In the course of these movements, students began to organize students' independent organizations, or students' autonomous bodies as organizations comprising ALL the students of each university.

Meanwhile the GHQ planned to transfer state universities (excluding the previous seven "Imperial Universities") to the local cities and to deliver them under the control of banks and big corporations, coupled with the scheme of raising tuition fees three times higher. From June 23 to 26, 1948, general strike was carried out against this plan with the participation of 300,000 students of 116 universities across Japan. Their demands were: "No transfer of state universities to local cities! Stop raising tuition fees! No higher railway fare!" The nationwide general strike gave birth to Zengakuren (All Japan Federation of Students' Autonomous Bodies) as an exhaustive national student organization with progressive political orientation, comprising all the universities and technical colleges and 70% of the private universities all over Japan. It was founded on September 18th, 1948. The struggle of students developed into another general strike on May 24, 1949 in which

139 universities participated. On this day, the government was forced to give up the plan and Zengakuren continued its struggle to demand withdrawal of the punishment of the students for organizing university strikes.

Now we are faced with the government's scheme of introducing *Doshusei* (Wider Area Local Government System), which includes a plan to transfer universities to local cities, and at the same time, aims at privatization of education (an attempt to reduce education to a tool of making profit for private purpose, that is, privatization). The postwar development reminds us that war and privatization of education were the original and starting point of the movement of Zengakuren. It teaches us that the struggle to defend education in an uncompromising confrontation against capitalist class gives us an important opportunity to achieve wide-ranging unity of students.

Victory of the struggle against “Red Purge” and degeneration of Japan Communist Party (JCP)

In July 1949, General MacArthur of GHQ gave a directive on “Red Purge” (Japanese version of McCarthyism) in the preparation of Korean War, declaring, “Japan is a fortress against the eastward advance of communism”. Communist party members in workplaces were expelled in large number by the order of GHQ and it was based on the information given by the list of JCP members. The leadership of JCP obeyed the order under “the Law Regulating the Organizations and Others” and presented the list of the party members to the authorities! Meanwhile, Dr. Eels came from the US and made nationwide visits to universities to give anti-communist lectures. Students of Zengakuren rose up for protest actions against this and succeeded in stopping his lectures in Tohoku University and Hokkaido University.

Korean War broke out on June 25, 1950 and GHQ ordered Zengakuren's disbanding. In defiance of this repression, Zengakuren successively organized anti-war actions on many university campuses. Hosei University students started boycott of examination on September 25, followed by Waseda students who held an anti-war mass rally with 3,000 participants and fought against the invading riot police on the campus. For this struggle 143 students were arrested and 86 were punished. This victorious militant mass struggle of Zengakuren further developed into the protest movement against Japan-US Peace Treaty and Anti-Subversive Activities Law.

In contrast to these militant mass struggles of Zengakuren, the leadership of Japan Communist Party was, at that moment, miserably scared by the legislation of Anti-Subversive Activities Law and made a desperate attempt of suppressing militant mass struggle of Zengakuren resorting to the shameless measures of excluding 38 Zengakuren leaders from the JCP.

The criticism of Cominform (Communist Information Bureau, International Stalinist organization) against JCP in January 1950 produced a bitter split within the party. After being engaged in “a Molotov-cocktail struggle” for a little while, JCP finally ended up with adopting a party line of outright “Parliamentarism” in its 6th National Conference in 1955. According to the JCP policy, student movement should deal with only trivial immediate demands of student masses. Zengakuren had to confront with such a leadership of JCP in its whole development. It should be noted that Zengakuren maintained its view on the students and the student movement that students belong to a social layer whose class consciousness is to be built up in ten years' time and that who reacts very sensitively to war and has a potential power to act on the sense of justice, while JCP insisted that students were after all to be absorbed into the ruling class.

(2) The birth of Anti-Stalinism Movement and the 1960 Ampo (Japan-US Security Treaty) struggle

The impact of Hungarian Revolution and the beginning of Anti-Stalinism Movement

In 1956, workers in Hungary rose up for an insurrection against Stalinist regime and were brutally suppressed. In 1957, national railway workers in Niigata, situated in northeastern Japan, carried out militant strike in defiance of the leadership of JCP. These two significant events gave birth to a political group that claimed to succeed the struggle of Trotsky against Stalin. Through serious discussions a fundamental position of anti-Stalinism was finally established by overcoming dogmatization of Trotskyism that clung to entrism (a political line of reforming Stalinist organization from within, abandoning the establishment of an independent revolutionary workers' party). [It resulted in the founding of Japan Revolutionary Communist League (JRCL) in 1957]

Under significant influence of these developments, the leadership of Zengakuren was gradually radicalized in its confrontation with the central of JCP through fighting the Sunagawa struggle against the expansion of Tachikawa US Air Base in the suburb of Tokyo and the education workers' struggle against performance evaluation. [In the course of the times, Communist League was founded in 1958]

Upsurge of the 1960 Ampo (Japan-US Security Treaty) struggle

The 1960 Ampo struggle was sparked by the battle in November 27, 1959, in which Zengakuren rushed into the Diet (Parliament) ground, overcoming the brake of JCP. The movement against the revision of Japan-US Security Treaty gained momentum by the impact of this struggle and reached its climax on June 15 1960 when 5.8 million workers and students rose up for protest actions and 11,000 demonstrators surrounded the Diet building. 1,500 militant students out of general mobilization of 15,700 forced their way through one of the gates and a student of Tokyo University, sister KANBA Michiko, was killed during the clash with the riot police. In spite of this struggle the revised Ampo (Japan-US Security Treaty) was ratified by the Diet at midnight on June 19, 1960, while workers and students surrounded the diet building. As a result Kishi administration fell down. Socialist Party and Communist Party put their power into settling the matter within a framework of parliamentary discussion and procedure with an intention to suppress a huge upsurge of people's angry movement. At the same time, the great struggle of coal miners in Miike, in Kyushu of southern Japan, against mass dismissal was also defeated under the reformist union leadership.

For the construction of a genuine workers' party

The 1960 Ampo struggle contributed to destroy the prevailing "myth of JCP". A large number of workers and students were disillusioned to see JCP cadres picketing in front of the Diet building to prevent demonstrators of Zengakuren from rushing to the Diet. (On that occasion, Japanese section of the Fourth International joined JCP against Zengakuren's demonstrators).

In these circumstances of political ferment, the CL (Communist League) that used to exert dominant influence over the leadership of Zengakuren could not work out an effective policy to overcome the situation of labor movement and student movement. The political line of CL was mainly focused on overcoming JCP through radicalization of tactics. Finally CL went into split over divided evaluation of Ampo struggle and failure of establishing a political orientation. Eventually a significant part of CL who was persuaded by the argument of JRCL that it was urgent "to establish a genuine workers' party instead of SP and CP" joined JRCL. Thus a fresh step for the construction of workers' party was made.

The struggle against US and USSR nuclear tests and split with Kakumaru, a Fascist group

In May 1962, Ikeda administration published a plan of University Reform. Zengakuren rose up to students' general strike against this new offensive.

The argument on nuclear tests of the US and the USSR caused a serious split in Japanese anti-nuclear movement long under the influence of Socialist Party and Communist Party. Zengakuren clarified its position of firm opposition against both of the US and the USSR nuclear tests and called for massive protest action of students and workers, declaring that international workers' solidarity alone could definitely eliminate war and nuke. It led to an upsurge of anti-nuke struggle.

In the course of these developments, confronted with a challenging task of building a genuine workers' party, a part of JRCL who refused to carry out this task dropped off and later degenerated into a fascist group.

(3) Reconstruction of Zengakuren: from October 8th Haneda Struggle in 1967 to 1970's Ampo and Okinawa Struggle

October 8th Haneda Struggle in 1967

The struggle against Japan-Korea Treaty in 1965 and the struggle against the Vietnam War brought about a new upsurge of student movement and young workers' movement. Initiated by the struggle of Keio University students against higher fees in 1965, mounting anger of students spread over universities across the country on the problems of student halls, student dormitories, illegal entrance, commercialization of university, introduction of Self-Defense Forces on campus and so on. Among others, the students of Yokohama State University rose up for a struggle in December 1965 and fought a strike in January and organized daily rally with the participation of 5,000 students and carried out independent curriculum

Zengakuren that had experienced a hard time since the defeat of the Ampo struggle in 1960 and ensuing split in leftwing as well as student movement gradually recovered its mass power and achieved an organizational reconstruction. On October 8, 1967, militant students of Zengakuren with helmet appeared at the entrance bridge of the Haneda Air Port and began marching toward the airport to prevent the visit of the then Prime Minister SATO to Vietnam at war. 1,000 student demonstrators clashed with 200 riot police and a Kyoto University student, brother Yamazaki, was killed. The Haneda battle publicly announced "the birth of new left" with 600 demonstrators injured and 58 arrested. A large number of students, hit by the death of brother Yamazaki, rose up for the struggles one after another: they fought against the visit of a US nuclear aircraft carrier to Sasebo harbor in Kyushu, south Japan; they joined the struggle of farmers in Sanrizuka against the construction of Narita Air Port. In 1968 students of Nihon University and Tokyo University started Zenkyoto (All Campus Joint Struggle Committee) movement, which soon developed into an occupation of Yasuda Auditorium of Tokyo University in January 1969.

Upsurge of 1970 Ampo/Okinawa Struggle

People in Okinawa under US occupation since the end of World War II as front base for the Vietnam War, stood up for struggle demanding withdrawal of US bases and Okinawa's return to Japan. At its head, military base workers waged a strike to protest rationalization of bases and dismissal and to stop the start of US bombers. Their slogans were: "Bases should die, not workers!" People in Okinawa got angry at the policy of the Japanese government to return Okinawa to Japan on the condition that US bases remain in Okinawa as before. They raised a demand, "No to the ratification of the deceitful Okinawa Return Agreement". Zengakuren elaborated its policy in a

slogan: “Take back Okinawa! Crush Ampo and down with Japanese imperialism!” and began organizing a mass protest action. On November 11, 1971 all Okinawa islands went into strike, which was joined by the Shibuya Battle in downtown Tokyo carried out by Zengakuren together with young workers in defiance of the invocation of the Anti-subversive Activities Law and the total ban on rallies and demonstrations in Tokyo. The 1970 Ampo/Okinawa Struggle developed into a great struggle, in which several thousands demonstrators were arrested in total number.

Initiative in the hands of workers and students who rallied around their own political party

The 1970 Ampo/Okinawa Struggle was fought in outright confrontation with the ruling structure of Japanese imperialism, which had been dependent on a deceitful policy of advocating the peaceful Constitution on the one hand and of excluding Okinawa from the validity of the Constitution in order to carry on war policy on the other hand. Socialist Party and Sohyo (General Council of Trade Unions of Japan) central made a desperate effort to suppress general strike in Okinawa in vain. The struggle of young workers and students grew powerful enough to change the existing structure of labor movement and promoted the effort of building up a genuine leadership instead of the traditional labor leadership under the influence of SP as well as CP.

Realizing the imminent danger of mounting power of young workers and students rallying around a new revolutionary orientation, Japanese government applied the Anti-subversive Activities Law to JRCL and Zengakuren whose president was arrested together with other comrades of JRCL. Brother HOSHINO Fumiaki, who fought the Shibuya Battle on November 14, 1971, on the forefront, was indicted for an alleged murder of a policeman and sentenced to life imprisonment. In spite of evident innocence, brother Hoshino has been detained for 35 years and fighting now in Tokushima prison against the outrageous deeds of the state power. In the course of intensified confrontation with the state power in 1970's, Kakumaru, a Fascist group, began to assault violently on militant students and workers under the protection of the police.

(4) Neo-liberal offensive launched: Decisive Battle in National Railways and Sanrizuka

The times have changed: 1974~75 World Economic Crisis and US defeat in the Vietnam War

1974~75 World Economic Crisis was the first simultaneous world crisis ever in the postwar time. Neo-liberalism then emerged to mark a turning point for the development of imperialist rule. In Japan in 1975, National Railway Workers' Union (NRU) carried out strike for eight days with a demand of recovering the right to strike (which was deprived of by law). But the result was fruitless. It signified an end of the labor movement that had relied upon the high growth of Japanese capitalist economy.

In 1981, in line with the policies taken by Ronald Reagan of the US and Margaret Thatcher in the UK, Nakasone 【姓と名が紛らわしい時以外はなるべく大文字を減らすため】 administration in Japan enforced Division and Privatization of National Railways that shed 100,000 jobs. His declared intention in attacking NRU (the major union of Sohyo) was to “destroy Sohyo and then Socialist Party” “to clear away labor unions through the administrative reform and set the [revised] Constitution in the right place”, in other words, to carry out union busting, war and constitutional revision. Kakumaru, Fascist group with dominant influence on Doro (National Railway Motive Power Union, today JR-Soren [=JRU, Japan Confederation of Railway Workers' Union]), supported the privatization policy and overtly cooperated with the management in dismissing workers.

Doro-Chiba waged strikes: the struggle of 1047 dismissed national railway workers started

To fight back this offensive, Doro-Chiba waged strikes in 1985 and thereafter without being intimidated by the management reprisal of dismissing 40 union members because of the strikes. Encouraged by this struggle, 1047 national railway workers, who were unjustly dismissed in the course of privatization, began fighting for their reinstatement. These struggles have a significant role in fighting back the privatization offensive and in preventing reorganization of labor movement toward right wing direction.

University struggle joins the struggle of national railway workers and farmers' struggle in Sanrizuka

In the aftermath of the 1970's struggle, a series of repressive measures were taken by university administrations on campuses: transfer of universities to the suburbs, deprivation of the self-governing right over the student dormitories and campuses, severe regulations on university festivals, restriction of distributing flyers and putting up signboards on campus, etc. The struggle in Tsukuba University, newly built suburban university, triggered protest actions on campus. Students further joined the struggle of Doro-Chiba and waged the Asakusa-bashi Battle on November 29, 1985, a guerrilla action to support the strike of Doro-Chiba. Just before this battle, on October 20, 1985, helmeted Zengakuren students fought in Sanrizuka against the Narita Air Port construction against the riot police to support fighting farmers there. The then president of Zengakuren was sentenced to 16 years' imprisonment for this struggle. The governmental attempts to suppress student movement backfired when more and more students joined the line of battle.

(5) From the struggle against Emergency Legislation and transformation of state universities into "Independent Administrative Legal Entities" to Hosei University struggle

1990's: the collapse of Soviet Union and the beginning of the age of world war

The collapse of Soviet Stalinism in 1990 heralded a new period of violent competition among imperialist world powers. Our age has been thrown back to the times of imperialist wars: Iraq War, Korean crisis, air raid on Yugoslavia, September 11 and Afghan War and finally the breakout of Iraq War. To fight back these reactionary drives, students of Zengakuren together with militant labor unions organized struggles against the new guideline of Japan-US Security Alliance and emergency legislations.

At the same time, struggles were fought on campus against the attempts of abolishing students' autonomous bodies, student dormitories and student houses and also to oppose to transformation of state universities into "Independent Administrative Legal Entities"(privatization of education) in 2004.

March 14, 2006 crackdown and Hosei University struggle

Hosei University Struggle was triggered by the arrest of students by 200 security police on March 14, 2006. These students wanted to protest against the regulation on distributing flyers and putting up signboards on campus. Thereafter the struggle has been carried out to demand withdrawal of the punishments on dissident students (expulsion from university or suspension) and to denounce repression on campus activities in defiance of the intimidation by arresting 118 students in past four years.

Let's achieve the withdrawal of dismissal of 1047 railway workers and mobilization of 10,000 workers and students to the November Workers' Rally in Tokyo!

Neo-liberal offensive has produced mounting anger in the whole society. We must organize it into a united action. We are convinced that our important task is to build up leaders through the actual struggle, to develop their ability to work out policy of the struggle and achieve correct understanding of the world and the era and finally to help wider range of student masses adopt these achievements as their own. When we succeed in carrying out this challenging task, we can surely achieve an explosive upsurge of the struggle. The central core of these efforts and struggles is Marxism, its thought and practice.

We of Zengakuren in Japan are firmly determined to revitalize student movement and labor movement powerfully.

It is our earnest desire to learn much more from your struggle in the US.

Let's promote our international solidarity that has just begun stronger and further!

Thank you once again.