Revolution Goes East

Linkhoeva, Tatiana

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The first necessity is developing the new age in consonance with the national character... We do not think that something suitable to Russia is valid for China or something fit for Japan is perfectly adaptable to France. On this point we differ from the Marxists... When it comes to ethnic differences derived from history and tradition, we do not think the world is divided only laterally [by class].

—Kiyosawa Kiyoshi, Why Liberalism?, 1935

As the government’s foreign policy rapidly moved toward reconciliation with the Soviet Union, concern over the effect of communist ideology on domestic society was growing within Japan. This concern over the communist threat in the 1920s united such disparate groups as liberals and the conservative bureaucracy, particularly in the Home and Justice ministries. Liberals pointed to worsening social conditions and ministerial bureaucrats to the degeneration of moral and cultural traditions to explain the appeal of “dangerous thought” to university professors, students, workers, women, outcast groups, and others. Unlike pan-Asianists and politicians concerned with foreign affairs, Japanese liberals and conservatives did not differentiate between the Soviet state and the Comintern, and they considered the Comintern and communism as the main ideological threats to Japan’s national polity. The Soviet Union was an embodiment of its ideology, and its foreign policy objectives were to make the world “red.” The imperial state, liberals and conservatives urged, must do its utmost to counter this threat.

During the 1920s, communism was perceived as essentially a foreign threat to the national community. And it was none other than the leaders of the Taishō liberal-democratic movement, most of whom were university professors and journalists, who first articulated and put forward this idea of communism as an external menace to the national community. However, since 1919, liberals’ anticommunist rhetoric had served its own purposes. Waging its own battle for the democratization of Japanese politics, Japanese liberals used the Red Scare to convince the government and the public that only the implementation of universal suffrage would stop the “Bolshevization” of the Japanese nation. The
conservative bureaucracy of the Home and Justice ministries, in contrast, became preoccupied with communism around 1922, when the JCP was first established. For the conservatives (although they did not call themselves such), concern over communism overlapped with their general dismay at the dramatically changing post–World War I Japanese society. The conservative bureaucrats’ program to combat international communism was an attempt to gain control over an increasingly diverse and diversified society based on reinforcing the unique traditionalist bond between the emperor, the nation, and the land.

The anticommunist trajectory formulated by liberal commentators and conservative bureaucrats culminated in the implementation of the Peace Preservation Law (Chian iijihō) of 1925, which suppressed the Japanese leftist movement and criminalized anyone convicted of following Bolshevik ideology. However, even more indicative of domestic anticommunism was the revision of the Peace Preservation Law in 1928. It imposed the death penalty on those who intended to alter the national polity (kokutai) but gave only two years’ imprisonment to those who wished to alter the capitalist system of private property. Put simply, none of the interwar anticommunists cared about the communists’ anticapitalist agenda. What they did care about was the shape of future politics, and who would determine it. Anxiety over international communism exposed for liberals, conservatives, and nationalists alike the unresolved and undefined nature of the Japanese national community and polity in transition. The communist doctrines of class struggle and international brotherhood were particularly worrisome for liberal and conservative commentators, because if not checked, they would further undermine post–World War I Japan’s already unstable state and society. The intellectual “panic” brought about by the Russian Revolution led not simply to the domestic suppression of any leftist opposition but, more importantly, to the emergence of various competitive political imaginaries, from national liberal to traditional monarchist to fascist. All of these imaginaries, nevertheless, regarded the state as the rule maker, as the only proper means for social unity, stability, and prosperity.

The Russian Revolution marked a great shift in Japanese interwar liberalism. Since the Taishō political crisis of 1912–13, which inaugurated the beginning of party politics in modern Japan, Japanese liberal commentators—most notably two professors of law at Tokyo Imperial University, Yoshino Sakuzō and Minobe Tatsukichi—centered their efforts on promoting political parties and strengthening the representative government against the old oligarchic, cliquish Meiji politics (hanbatsu seiji). In 1918, the first party government was formed under the leadership of Hara Takashi, leader of the majority Seiyūkai Party. However, the great Rice Riots in the summer of 1918, workers’ strikes, students’ agitation, and
the arrival of international communism in Japan exposed the limitations of Japanese liberalism to answer the needs of society at the crossroads. As Marxism and communism began to win over the minds of students, workers, peasants, women, and intellectuals, liberal commentators had to convince these newly emerging social groups that liberal democracy was different from socialist or communist democracies and explain how their definition of a liberal-democratic organization of society was better than a socialist one. As such, the Russian Revolution became the stimulus for the expansion, both political and theoretical, of Japanese interwar liberalism.

Beginning in 1917, Japanese liberals advocated for universal suffrage, a demand to extend democratic rights to as many male subjects of the empire as possible. Liberals were less concerned with social and economic reforms per se, because they believed that the implementation of universal suffrage would have an overall positive effect on social and economic conditions. To succeed with these goals, liberal educators, intellectuals, students, and journalists began to organize various study and meeting groups around the country and to publish in the exploding press media. One of the first and most famous organizations was the Reimeikai (Dawn, founded in December 1918), established by Yoshino and Fukuda Tokuzō. Others included the Kaizō dōmeikai; Warera group (established by Ōyama Ikuo and journalist Hasegawa Nyozeikan in 1919); a study group organized around the journal Shakai mondai kenkyū and its founder, Professor of Economics Kawakami Hajime at Kyoto Imperial University; and the liberal editorial of the magazine Tōyō Keizai Shinpō (the future politician Ishibashi Tanzan was its star journalist). What characterized Taishō liberalism, however, was its commitment to the state, its belief that in Japan it was the responsibility of the imperial state to ensure the well-being of its subjects. Liberals thus promoted representative government under the umbrella of the monarchy, the dominance of mass-based parties, reduced bureaucracy, and a responsible military. The most identifiable component of the definition of interwar liberals was their belief that democratic politics ultimately served the goals of national unity and social harmony.

Taishō liberals’ self-identification developed in opposition not to the state but to the socialists. The quarrel between liberals and socialists was never about economics; both, in fact, despised laissez-faire capitalism. Instead, they disagreed about the shape of politics. Japanese-style democracy, liberals anxiously argued, served national interests, while communist democracy professed “empty” and subversive internationalism. Communism in this context became the radical backdrop against which liberal commentators justified and pursued their own demands. The notion of the “red threat” was strategically utilized by liberal commentators: the extended franchise and democratic reforms were the only
solution, they argued, that could strengthen and unite the nation against the external destabilizing threat. Taishō liberalism, however, was hardly successful: it failed to win over students, who moved en masse to more appealing left-wing radicalism, and it produced many defectors (for example, Ōyama Ikuo), who became disillusioned not simply with party politics in Japan but with Japanese-style liberalism’s theoretical compliance with the increasingly repressive state.

Taishō liberal educators and journalists—Yoshino Sakuzō, Fukuda Tokuzō, Ōyama Ikuo, Kiyosawa Kiyoshi, and others—greeted the February Revolution with great enthusiasm as the “people’s revolution” against the corrupt and autocratic tsarist government and bureaucracy. However, after the news of the Bolshevik takeover reached Japan, few of them recognized its revolutionary potential, regarding it instead as part of the ongoing Great War. Like the Japanese government, it took some time for Japanese liberals to accept the new Bolshevik regime as legitimate. Understanding the Great War as a war between the forces of democracy and the forces of autocracy and militarism, Yoshino Sakuzō condemned the October Revolution as an illegitimate coup, an “unpatriotic” action of the Bolshevik militant group. The abolition of the state and its main organs, believed to be at the core of the Leninist program, was a sign of defeatism, he insisted. The Bolshevik Party and its insistence on the dictatorship of the proletariat seemed to many supporters of Western-style parliamentary government to thwart the normal course of democratic and liberal changes in Russian society initiated by the February events.\(^3\)

Once more information on the new Bolshevik state became known in Japan, and as the Bolsheviks solidified their power, Yoshino recognized that Bolshevism was perhaps part of the “trend of the times,” part of the evolving international democratic movement, but surely a more extreme version of popular protest. When in a special issue of the magazine Chūō Kōron (June 1919), various contributors condemned Bolshevism, likening it to a pestilence, Yoshino disagreed. Addressing the liberal and educated audience of Chūō Kōron, Yoshino pointed out that widespread fatigue from the Great War and Lenin’s promise to deliver “peace, land, and bread” made understandable the mass support the Bolsheviks enjoyed among the Russian people. In this sense, the October Revolution in Russia was a people’s revolution, a lower-class revolt against incompetent authorities, rather than an illegitimate takeover by debased radicals. Japanese liberals recognized that the success of the Bolshevik Revolution originated in Russia’s peculiar political and social circumstances. As such, Japanese readers should keep in mind, Yoshino warned, that the Bolshevik Revolution was a social revolution, an ideological solution to the problems of Russian political and social backwardness.

Yoshino pointed out, however, that Bolshevism was different from “orthodox” socialism. Socialism struggled for the same ideals as minponshugi, the term that
Yoshino used to describe the type of democracy suited for Japan—democracy in which sovereignty resided not in the people but with the monarchy and imperial government serving the people’s welfare. In contrast, the Bolshevist claim of democracy was a sham. Bolshevism as it had been implemented in Soviet Russia was undemocratic because it installed a one-party regime and rejected representative government, claiming that democratic institutions were not in the interests of workers. The prominent liberal journalists Murobuse Kōshin and Ōyama Ikuo initially also attacked Bolshevism as another type of autocracy that rejected the true spirit of democracy. Bolshevist-type socialism resembled Bismarck’s policy, Murobuse wrote, and was in reality a form of state capitalism. Ōyama condemned the Russian Revolution as an instance of a “disgraceful baptism of blood.” Revolution as a method, he continued, was a “most abhorrent thing,” appropriate only for backward and decaying countries like Russia. In Japan, Ōyama continued, it was not necessary to resort to radical measures and dismantle the whole political system, but rather only to remove certain obstacles to the proper functioning of the constitution and democratic politics. In support of liberalism, Ōyama stressed the value of democratization as a barrier to the spread of radical ideas in Japan. If the government did not want to see people turn toward political extremism, warned Ōyama, it must urgently undertake a program of social reform and democratization.

For liberals, class struggle constituted a great threat to the democratic process and the coherence of the national community. For Yoshino and Ōyama, harmony between capital and labor was indeed achievable through democratic mechanisms, whereas the state as a neutral organ served to mediate between conflicting interests. That was contrary to the belief of socialists, who viewed the state always as a tool of a particular class—the bourgeoisie or the workers—and as something that eventually must disappear. Against his socialist and communist competitors, Yoshino advanced a classless political vision:

The extension of suffrage to the extreme is to destroy class bias. Class interest must be banished from politics. If both capitalists and workers consider only their own class interests, impartial resolution of state affairs becomes impossible. The place to discuss class interest is elsewhere. As a member of this nation, I would like to see the Diet provide impartial and consensual opinion that transcends class bias. . . . In sum, taking into consideration the essential feature of the Diet, its members should not base their thinking on class interests. Even though each member may think of class interests, the Diet as a whole should not wear the color of [a particular] class. In this respect, universal suffrage can be an ideal institution.
Neither the natural rights of every individual nor the expansion of workers’ rights was the theoretical basis of universal suffrage. Instead, suffrage should rest on “social cooperation” based on the “organic” relations between individuals and the neutral and therefore benevolent state.

If interwar Japanese liberalism is defined as advocacy for the extension of political rights to the broader male population, then it had its adherents even within the military. Even some army commentators recognized that the army’s conservatism did not harmonize with the democratic trends of the time and might undermine its unity and stability. In 1922, retired Lieutenant Colonel Satō Kōjirō wrote The Military and Social Problems (Guntai to shakai mondai), one of the army’s first responses to social discontent and the new political trends. He lamented the growing division between the army and the people but did not express hostility either to democracy or to socialism. Both ideas, he wrote, in fact existed in Japan from ancient times, and as soon as the people and the army come fully into contact with them, their perceived danger will recede and they will be placed in proper perspective. Satō criticized the army for not allowing a healthy discussion to develop, which would alleviate the feeling of alienation between the military and the people. He reprimanded the army for its cultivated feeling of superiority and exclusivity, its conservatism, and its lack of democratic attitude in dealing with the soldiers and public. As democratic measures, he proposed that officers receive training in social affairs (shakai kunren); military youth schools (yōnen gakkō), the breeding place of army conservatism, be abolished; and prospective military academy students be selected from regular high school graduates. Satō, however, insisted that future wars would be total wars, and therefore, in order to achieve the total mobilization of Japanese society, giving people a much greater stake in their political society was a necessary requirement. Satō’s book caused a sensation in Japan and, in fact, his idea of democratization as a component of mass mobilization found widespread approval in the army, where preoccupation with total mobilization had been growing since World War I.

Satō reacted to developments in the army that originated with the Siberian Intervention. Both the liberal and the nationalist press reported frustration among Japanese troops in Siberia (especially rank-and-file soldiers and junior officers) with their senior officers about the repressive character of the army and the seeming pointlessness of their dispatch to Siberia. Many new conscripts refused to read the oath of loyalty to the army, some mutinied against their superiors, and a few even deserted. There was very low morale in the army: looting the local population and stealing inside the army barracks were common. The army command was aware of the factors that contributed to the internal destabilization of the army. Most of the soldiers came from impoverished peasant families and were influenced by the general mood in favor of “democracy.” Some had it
even worse: many enlisted soldiers had to pacify the regions participating in the Rice Riots before being sent to Siberia. As Yoshino pointed out, new conscripts, having endured the traumatic experience of suppressing riots by farmers whose plight they understood all too well, adopted a negative view of the army.\textsuperscript{10} The army officials branded those who complained as “socialists” or “radicals” and were vigilant about limiting soldiers’ contact with the outside world, carefully monitoring soldiers’ attitudes and which books and periodicals were sent to them from Japan. The progressive magazines \textit{Kaizō}, \textit{Kaihō}, and \textit{Chūō kōron} were strictly prohibited.\textsuperscript{11}

It was true that those in the military had grounds for concern. They knew that the communist Katayama Sen established a small printing workshop in Chita to produce Bolshevik propaganda leaflets, which the Japanese communists tried to smuggle into Japanese garrisons in Siberia and into Japan. However, this propaganda was not effective, because very few leaflets passed the gates of garrisons and reached the soldiers; not a single Japanese officer or enlisted man joined a communist party.\textsuperscript{12} To counter the worries of the army command, the Japanese liberal press (including its sympathizers within the army) pointed out that the army’s problems in Siberia were a reflection of domestic problems, rather than being related to communism per se. But the liberals also emphasized that communism could become a major problem in the army if political reforms were not extended to those who were enlisted.

One of the first sophisticated analyses of Soviet communism was offered by Fukuda Tokuzō (1874–1930), a professor of economics at Keio University. Fukuda was a very influential public intellectual, an adviser to the government, and the first expert in Marxism, especially its economic thought. Fukuda’s articles on the Soviet Union were read by Chief of the General Staff Uehara Yūsaku, among others, and the two had private conversations in 1919.\textsuperscript{13} His writings and interpretation of Marxism, along with those of Professor of Economics Kawakami Hajime, also influenced early Chinese and Korean Marxists.\textsuperscript{14} Fukuda argued that Russian Bolshevism was an ideology of reaction (\textit{handō shisō}) and could not be understood without knowledge of the Russian national situation and sentiments before and during the Great War. Fukuda rightly pointed out that Russia had been undergoing rapid and uneven industrialization; most of the land and industry still belonged to the big landlords and the aristocracy, which caused great social and political upheavals. “Caught between the capitalist and feudal economic systems, the Russian people’s resentment had been growing for a long time. This revolution was triggered by the war and their defeats in it. Thus, the conditions to readily accept the Bolshevik movement were created by Russia’s long history.”\textsuperscript{15} In one of the first Japanese accounts of the Russian Revolution published in Japan, Fukuda explained that the core of communism was the
abolition of private property, which was the basis for the total restructuring of society. Communists believed that only with the destruction of private property could human dignity, equality, and freedom be obtained. Russia’s peculiar historical and social conditions, Fukuda concluded, made the Bolsheviks’ advocacy of class struggle logical and understandable, but only in the Russian context.

Fukuda attributed Japan’s failure in Siberia to its misunderstanding of Bolshevism as an ideology and of the Bolsheviks as a political group: the term kagekiha (extremists), commonly used in Japan to describe Russian communists, tempted Japanese people to mistake Bolsheviks for libertarian and antistate anarchists and to ignore the fact that the Bolsheviks’ main priority was the creation of a proletarian state. Bolshevism, Fukuda wrote, stood for a “Big Principle, for a potent ideology [shugi] that had the power to rouse and unite hundreds of thousands of people.” The intervention, he maintained, was therefore misguided and pointless; Lenin and Trotsky were not simply upstart outsiders but expressed the hopes and wishes of the Russian people. The tsar was not only a source of evil for the Russian people and the world but also a threat to Japan. Fukuda exhorted the Japanese to be grateful to the Russian communists for eliminating Russian and German despotism and imperialism. Although he was hardly sympathetic to socialism, Fukuda insisted that Japan needed more study of the Soviet Union and its ideology to confront uninformed commentaries, which could be harmful to establishing good relations with the Soviet state.

Nevertheless, since 1919 socialism and its more radical form, communism, had become the most apparent and easily identifiable enemy of the state, and liberal commentators rushed to differentiate themselves from the Left by declaring the sanctity of the constitutional monarchy and the preeminence of the private property system in modern Japan. Like Ōyama above, Fukuda maintained that the antimonarchical doctrine of communism was alien to Japanese society. Fukuda argued that the backbone of Japanese national unity was the monarchical tradition (kokutai), which nothing and no one could change. Related to this, Fukuda dismissed the idea that class warfare could develop in Japan: “Japan is a lucky country as it also went through a rapid industrialization, but the clash between the old and the new was not as strong, the progress of the country was steady, and economic life in Japan was healthy. Japanese people’s national feelings are completely different and there are no conditions for Bolshevik ideas to thrive in Japan.” Class warfare was incompatible with the Japanese way of thinking, and modern Japanese society was healthy enough to avoid such a disastrous development. Moreover, Fukuda asserted that communism would never take root in Japan because the abolition of private property would lead to the collapse of industry, and those accustomed to enjoying the spoils of the capitalist system would never turn against it. Relying on the writings of the Ukrainian Marxist
scholar Mikhail Tugan-Baranovsky, Fukuda challenged Marx’s theory that capitalism had an internal drive toward self-destruction. Fukuda insisted that capitalism had the potential for transformation and improvement and could develop indefinitely. That last argument embroiled him in what became a famous public debate over Marxist economics with Kawakami Hajime from Kyoto Imperial University (and later many more Marxist economists), which lasted for ten years. To counter Fukuda, Kawakami, who since 1919 had turned from a Christian liberal position to Marxism, employed Rosa Luxemburg’s theory of the stagnation and inevitable end of capitalism—which was, in effect, the first introduction of her theory into Japan.\textsuperscript{19}

Fukuda thus brushed off the growing popularity of Marxism in Japan. Communist ideas were known in Japan only to a few young, idealistic intellectuals, he wrote in various popular outlets, while the nonorganized workers cared only for immediate economic improvement.\textsuperscript{20} Fukuda additionally pointed out that the internationalist claims of Bolshevism were simply false. He insisted that theirs was the age of nation-states, and that individuals always and unavoidably thought in national terms. The communists’ aspiration to create a supranational brotherhood was thus unrealistic, and the Bolsheviks’ recent nationality policies, their support of nationalist movements abroad, and their overtly nationalist foreign policy directly undermined their internationalist claim.\textsuperscript{21} Fukuda thus emerged as one of the main defenders of the capitalist liberal order, which was firmly entrenched in modern Japan, and in his opinion could not be dislodged by communist ideas or movement within Japan.

Fukuda’s position was, however, more an instance of wishful thinking than a reflection of the reality of the early 1920s. Students of his own society (Reimeikai) were increasingly abandoning their membership, while discussions at meetings revolved around socialism and communism rather than parliamentary politics. In fact, anxiety among educated elite and public men over socialism’s and communism’s hold on the Taishō society was steadily growing, and the lack of consensus among them of what to make of that is striking. Take, for example, the public debate that unfolded in the magazine \textit{Roshia hihyō} in July 1919. Several leading journalists, university professors, and army officers were asked to share their thoughts about the possibility of the Bolshevization of Japan. Aoki Seiichi, a member of the powerful Association of Veterans, described how he had gone to Siberia a year earlier and been horrified at the army’s demoralization. Japanese soldiers, he asserted, were becoming very susceptible to Bolshevik ideas amid the chaotic environment. Aoki insisted that Bolshevism was a threat to the Japanese Empire because the Siberian Bolsheviks instigated unrest among anti-Japanese Koreans in Siberia and were thus responsible for various Korean uprisings. The rise of the radicalized anti-Japanese movement in China was also the result of the Bolshevization of the East Asian
region. Aoki saw a difference between socialism, which dealt with social problems, and Bolshevism, which was socially destructive and antinational. He ended his opinion piece, however, with the insistence that Bolshevism was part of the Jewish conspiracy to overtake the world.22

The liberal journalist Murobuse Kōshin doubted the influence of Bolshevism in Japan but, like Aoki, pointed out that the military in Siberia had been strongly drawn to Bolshevism. The success of Bolshevism in Russia, he emphasized, was due to the Bolshevization of Russian soldiers. Bolshevism appealed to Japanese soldiers as well, and thus the common Japanese eventually could be drawn into Bolshevism, too. He also pointed out that, unlike Japanese soldiers, US soldiers in Siberia were not interested in Bolshevism. This difference, he claimed, was due to the relative lack of political freedoms in Japan; the more the Japanese government denied civic freedoms to its people, the greater the possibility of the Bolshevization of young people and workers.23

In contrast, the journalist Ōba Kakō argued that Bolshevist ideas were popular in Japan, citing the many popular magazines that dedicated more and more issues to Marxism and the translations of the main Marxist thinkers, which sold out immediately. He also pointed out that the Japanese educated public had cooled toward the liberal democratic movement because they found Bolshevist ideas more relevant. Ōba noted that communist propaganda had nothing to do with this popularity. Compared to Taishō liberalism, Bolshevism seemed truly egalitarian, and thus had more appeal to Japanese soldiers and workers.24

Kemuyama Sentarō, a historian of Russian anarchism, expressed his doubts that Bolshevism or socialism were properly understood in Japan, if anyone could talk about their influence at all. Bolshevism, he wrote, was a Russian phenomenon, based on the peculiar history of Russia and the “self-destructive character” of its people. Although there was no doubt that Russian proletarian absolutism shook the “world of capitalists and aristocracy” with its radical ideas and actions, the situation in industrialized and advanced Japan was inopportune for a Bolshevik revolution. However, he warned, as the Japanese were “impressionable people and have a tendency to run from one extreme to another,” the government should be watchful.25 Those few who denied the possibility of the Bolshevization of Japan maintained that there was no organized Japanese working class that could struggle to take political power. The liberal Kayahara Kazan dismissed Japanese workers as timid and ashamed of their status as workers. He also pointed out that socialist and Bolshevik ideas were popular among university professors and students, who were too immature to translate their ideas into an actual political movement. The current “socialist craze” in Japan, Kayahara concluded, would only “confuse already confused minds, make more anxious already anxious people.” He called on the government—which, he acknowledged, had been
“defining education, morals, and the philosophy of its people”—to step up and create a new ideological framework for the national polity.26

These opinion pieces demonstrate how undecided the educated Japanese were about the causes and goals of the Russian Revolution. Understanding the revolutionary upheaval in Russia as the outcome of a particular set of circumstances (uneven industrialization under autocratic rule and the consequences of World War I), Japanese liberal commentators did not fail to emphasize the potential danger communist ideology posed to Japanese society, in which a majority of its people were disenfranchised. In sum, the issue of Bolshevism came hand in hand with the unfolding movement in Japan for wider democratic rights. As Professor Fukuda and retired Lieutenant General Satō had pointed out, most of Japan’s population were peasants and workers whose lives and needs could not be ignored any longer by the state and big business; the state did not have any moral right to recruit its young men into the army or demand greater commitment to the needs of the state without providing them with basic political guarantees. The state also must bring big business into implementing labor regulations in accordance with the “trends of the time.” A political minority would soon become a political majority, warned Fukuda. The liberals insisted that the Russian Revolution made it all the more clear that the state must initiate new social policies to deal with existing “social problems” and “evil practices” by building a social democratic welfare state, at the core of which was not the protection of private property but rather of human life and human dignity.27 But as Fukuda, Yoshino and others maintained, imperial democracy (minponshugi) and the social welfare state must prioritize the people (kokumin) and the state, not the interests of a particular social class. Concerned with the labor problem and, in fact, contributing to the labor legislation that had been worked out in the government, Fukuda warned that the most dangerous outcome of both laissez-faire capitalism and conservatism would be the people’s turn to Bolshevism as an attractive alternative or solution.

At the same time, liberals warned the public and government against the danger of Bolshevik internationalism, which Russians would impose by unleashing “world revolution.” Even if the Russian Bolsheviks were to succeed in building a proletarian state in Russia, warned Yoshino, the neighboring nonproletarian countries should not be complacent. The Soviet state, operating via its agent, the Comintern, would work on destroying the political and economic regimes hostile to communism. Besides, this would be done by the Comintern agents in order to safeguard the Russian Revolution and provide security for the Soviet state. For their own survival, the Soviet state and the Comintern would never stop their propaganda activities. Yoshino urged the Japanese police to be vigilant about this danger and the Japanese state to take preventive care of its own
workers. Fukuda also appealed to the government to carefully monitor homemade socialist “cosmopolitan-unpatriots.” All the distinguished participants in the debate at Roshia hihyō, although in disagreement as to the degree of influence that Bolshevism exercised in Japan, did agree that the government and the ruling elite should take a more proactive and aggressive anticomunist position.

Liberal commentators were therefore united in pressuring the government to buttress its anticomunist position with a more coherent national ideological framework. The new national ideology should not be based on appeals to patriotism or nostalgia for traditional values but on mobilizing people’s commitment to the state and its purpose by extending voting rights. Democratic liberals argued that democratization of the political process would provide a means for the people to identify themselves with the state through participation in national affairs, thus creating national harmony, consensus, and a sense of community. Concerned with strengthening and unifying the nation through active political participation by the empire’s subjects, liberals grew anxious at the Bolsheviks’ slogans of permanent world revolution. They reckoned that the Russian Revolution, despite its origins in Russia’s peculiar historical circumstances, still could become “contagious” as a result of communist Russia’s propaganda activities in politically and socially unstable post–World War I Japan. Although expressing confidence in the moral and ideological strength of the Japanese national community, these commentators called for a series of reforms to curb “subversive” thought and actions within Japan. As such, the anticomunist proposals of the leaders of Taishō liberalism agreed with the thinking of the Home and Justice ministries.

In response to the demands of the Taishō democratic liberals, party politicians and conservative intellectuals recognized that democratic changes, part of “the trend of the world,” must be included in domestic and foreign policy to counter the rise of domestic labor disputes and international communism. Moreover, the democratization of domestic politics was required to strengthen cooperation with the United States and to improve Japan’s international standing. The new Hara Takashi cabinet of September 1918 welcomed the universal suffrage movement, albeit for a short period, while the oppositional parties began to promote liberal labor policy, calling for the legalization of labor unions in an effort to minimize growing social conflict and reduce the appeal of radical thought among workers. The Home Ministry proposed a progressive labor union bill in 1920, which, however, never passed. Nevertheless, the recommendations of liberal commentators on strengthening the national ideological framework aligned with the concerns of the conservative bureaucracy within the government, which soon embarked on its own program to stabilize the increasingly riven society.
Conservative bureaucrats understood communism as a foreign ideology that threatened Japan’s cultural traditions and its unique national structure, defined by the timeless ethical bonds between the emperor, the nation, and the land. Preoccupied with what they understood as the degeneration of national morals in the post–World War I period, conservatives warned of communism and the ability of foreign communists to infiltrate Japanese society. To protect, defend, and reinvigorate Japan’s unique cultural and political traditions, the conservative bureaucracy embarked on its own response to the Russian Revolution by reinforcing the Meiji family-state orthodoxy.

The preoccupation of the Home Ministry and Justice Ministry with internal order and the domestic labor and socialist movements dates back to 1900, the year in which the Public Order and Police Law declared organization by workers to be a disturbance of public peace and order. The law made unions and strikes illegal and outlawed the circulation of literature agitating for strikes and walkouts, crippling the labor and socialist movements for decades. Under this law, the Social Democratic Party (Shakai Minshutō, established in 1901) was banned within hours. In 1906, the Japan Socialist Party (Nihon Shakaitō) was banned within a year. Socialist newspapers and periodicals were routinely harassed by the police, and their editors fined and put in prison.

In 1910, the Ministry of Justice indicted a group of twenty-four anarchists for having plotted to assassinate the emperor, in what is known as the High Treason Incident (Taigyaku jiken). The trial and execution of eleven defenders ended, in effect, the Meiji socialist movement. The purpose of the trial was not so much to punish a conspiracy to kill the Japanese emperor but to crush the nascent Japanese socialist and anarchist movements by eliminating their most important leaders. One of the consequences of the High Treason Incident was the establishment of the first Special Higher Police unit (commonly known as Tokkō) within the Tokyo Metropolitan Police Board (Keishichō) in August 1911. The Tokkō police became responsible for surveilling leftist movements. The public trial in the High Treason Incident became a show trial, warning the public that the state would not tolerate any radical attempts to redefine the national imperial polity. Wary of the ongoing process of the annexation of Korea (1910) and a possible backlash at home and in the colonies, the government resorted to suppression of any dissent to its actions. In the long run, however, the impact of the High Treason Incident had the opposite effect. Because of the publicity it received, interest in socialist ideas and sympathy with the cause of the accused spread well beyond socialist circles, preparing the ground for the approving reception of the Bolshevik Revolution by the increasingly politically active, disenfranchised masses.

After the Russian Revolution of 1917, in the midst of the economic and social crisis and endless political and financial scandals, the Home and Justice
ministries became genuinely disturbed by the waves communism had begun making in Japan. As labor and peasant unrest was growing, and homegrown socialists activated and established contacts with Russian and Asian radicals, so the state preoccupation with social movements increased. Several events and developments between 1919 and 1925 converged, producing a general sense of crisis within the state bureaucracy. First, the number and intensity of peasant participants in the Rice Riots greatly impressed the government, so even though domestic socialists had nothing to do with the riots, as a matter of precaution the police arrested many leaders of Japanese socialism in the fall of 1918. But the worst fears of the Home and Justice ministries were realized in May 1921, when police arrested a man named Kondō Eizō in the port of Shimonoseki, because they were suspicious of his excessive spending during a rowdy night of drinking. To their great shock, Kondō turned out to be a communist who had just returned to Japan from Shanghai, where the Russian Comintern agent Grigory Voitinsky had given Kondō the enormous (by contemporary standards) sum of 6,500 yen to organize a communist party in Japan. The conservatives in the government seized the opportunity to draft legislation that would specifically target the new ideological threat.

The state backlash in response to this arrest had important consequences because the bureaucracy now faced the problem of defining not only the foreign ideological threat but also what lay behind the threat. In other words, bureaucrats and the police were forced to define both what was communism and what made it different from the more familiar anarchism and socialism, as well as incompatible with the Japanese national community and polity. With this aim, in late 1921 the Justice Ministry in the Hara Cabinet drafted the Bill for the Control of Extreme Social Movements (Kageki shakai undō torishimarihō), largely modeled after English laws and legal theories dealing with sedition, which would have punished communist and anarchist propaganda with up to seven years in prison. In February 1922, the next prime minister, Takahashi Korekiyo, sponsored the bill, which passed the House of Peers but at the end was withdrawn by the majority party Seiyūkai leaders for fear that it would fail in the House of Representatives and generate more popular agitation.

Despite their disapproval of communism, liberals joined the nationwide protests against the antisocialist bill. The agitation became a good platform for them to demand that it was time to grant more political rights and freedoms to the people, as the rest of the civilized world had done. The more liberal members of the Diet, together with liberal journalists, argued that rather than mounting a war on new ideas, the government should investigate what lay behind the social protest movement in order to correct unjust economic, social, and political conditions. Not the bill but the extension of suffrage would reverse the tendency
toward radicalism, liberals argued. The primary movers of the campaign against the bill were socialists, who also joined the liberal agitation for universal suffrage, albeit not for long. For socialists understood that the labor movement needed to use available parliamentary mechanisms—partly as a platform for rousing the masses, partly as a means of winning short-term reforms. As long as the conservative government resisted democratic reforms, liberals and socialists usually joined forces. The united front of liberals and socialists, however, was short lived: it fell apart once universal suffrage was implemented in 1925, and in some notable cases even before.\textsuperscript{35}

The bill faced harsh criticism both inside and outside the Diet for ambiguity in its wording. While drafting the bill, the bureaucrats failed to satisfactorily distinguish between socialism, anarchism, and communism. Neither were they able to define what needed to be defended. The legislators could not clarify or come to a consensus about the “fundamental structure of society” (shakai no konpon sōshiki) and the national monarchical polity (kokutai), which were presumably under foreign ideological threat. In the end, neither kokutai nor seitai (form of government)—terms that were to generate considerable debate in 1925—were included in the bill.\textsuperscript{36} The proponents of the bill settled on a formulation of the law intended to stem the flow of radical propaganda coming into Japan and prevent the Japanese from working in concert with foreign radicals. The law would apply only to those who were in contact with foreign agents, receiving money from outside the country, or importing propaganda materials in order to “subvert the laws of the state” or “alter the fundamental structure of society.” In the middle of the growing universal suffrage movement, conservatives made sure to clarify that the bill in no way was to infringe on the freedom of speech and expression of the proletarian masses (musan kaikyū).\textsuperscript{37}

The main significance of this judicial attempt to pass an antileftist bill was that it clearly identified the binary relationship between “dangerous foreign thought” and domestic objects to be protected, which would form the basis of the later 1925 law.\textsuperscript{38} To describe Russian communism, bureaucrats tended often to use the word “plague” (pesuto), which in fact captures very well their imagining of communism as an external threat perpetrated by foreign radicals—Russian, Korean, and Chinese—against the Japanese national community. The idea that communism was a foreign disease was already present when in early 1918, then Ambassador to Russia Uchida discussed communism in Russia as essentially German sociopolitical thought brought by Germans, alien to Russian traditional thought. As the bill proposal reveals, in the early 1920s, to prevent Japan from being contaminated by this disease, tightening border controls and establishing surveillance at home and on the Asian continent seemed to the bureaucrats to be sufficient measures.
To counter the increasing tide of opinion favoring reconciliation with communist Russia, the Home Ministry went on the offensive. While the Soviet foreign deputy Ioffe was still in Tokyo, in June 1923 the police carried out mass arrests of leftists, including university professors and prominent public leaders, on the charge of fomenting a communist plot. The arrests took place at the same time as the government announced its decision to go ahead with official negotiations with Ioffe. A reporter from the Chicago Daily News captured the “striking paradox” of Japanese policy vis-à-vis communism and the Soviet Union: “while the police authorities connected the alleged plot with agitation for recognition of the USSR, the government by according Ioffe an official status in the negotiations was actually aiding the propagation of ‘dangerous thought.’” The arrests were prompted by searching the office of Sano Manabu, a professor at Waseda University and one of the emerging leaders of the Japanese communist movement. Sano was also related to Gotō Shinpei through his older brother. So as Gotō participated in official negotiations with the Soviet leadership, his relative Sano was fleeing from the Japanese police to Shanghai, together with a few other comrades, where they became the target of the Japanese consular police. Although disapproving the actions of the Home Ministry, Gotō did not make any public remarks on this issue. Foreign and domestic policies, while influencing each other, did not interfere in each other’s realms.

Even though the state was alarmed at the establishment of the JCP and its contacts with the Comintern, the arrested members of the JCP got off comparatively unharmed. Some cases were dismissed for lack of evidence; of those found guilty, none entered prison until the sentences were confirmed by the high court in April 1926, and even then they did not serve full terms (ranging between eight and ten months), because of a general amnesty granted in honor of the Taishō emperor, who died that year. Most were released on bail and continued to be active in the communist movement. Judging from the lightness of the sentences given in the roundup in the summer of 1923, the concern was not with the domestic radical movement per se but with foreign leftist radicals, who were “trying their best to make our country red.” However, a renewed awareness that there was no appropriate law that would be able to specifically deal with the communist movement became part of the backdrop against which the Diet began to debate new anticommunist legislation.

Anxious about the external communist menace, the conservative bureaucracy began rapidly moving to radical rightist politics, resorting to using political violence against its opponents. The Great Kantō earthquake of September 1, 1923, caused extensive damage and confusion and became the backdrop against which the conservative bureaucracy teamed up with the military police and extreme nationalists to choke back the labor and leftist movements. Investigation of the
alleged communists arrested in June 1923 was still under way on September 1, when in the aftermath of the earthquake ten union organizers were shot by the police, and the anarchist Ōsugi Sakae, his little nephew, and the feminist anarchist Itō Noe were beaten to death by the military police (the notorious ken-heitai). The official investigation ended in shockingly lenient sentences—for the murder of ten labor agitators, the police were ordered simply to issue an apology. The military police officer Amakasu Masahiko, responsible for the death of the anarchists, was released from prison after three years and subsequently occupied high-ranking posts in Manchukuo.

Moreover, it was the minister of justice himself, Hiranuma Kiichirō (1867–1952), who assisted in “restoring public order” by providing funds to rightist organizers of anti-Korean violence (six thousand Koreans were murdered), who staged acts of arson all over Tokyo to add credence to rumors of a Korean uprising. He also protected the military police officers on trial, whose actions brought back, he argued, “a sense of duty and patriotism.” In 1926, now head of the Privy Council and the House of Peers, Hiranuma became an adviser to Kenkokuai (National Creation Society), established by the radical right-wing leader Akao Bin, which resorted to numerous acts of violence—including the notorious strike breaking at the Noda Soy Sauce Factory in 1927 and a bungled attempt to set fire to the house of the liberal-turned-socialist Ōyama Ikuo. In another famous example, in 1919 Home Minister Tokonami Takejirō jointly with yakuza bosses founded the Dai Nihon Kokusuikai organization (Greater Japan National Essence Association), which had at its peak approximately two hundred thousand members and primarily acted as a strike breaker and harasser of socialists and labor leaders, as well as outcasts and members of the universal suffrage movement. What is notable is that the conservative bureaucracy used right-wing organizations—the Kokusuikai, Yamato Minrōkai (Yamato National Service Association, 1921), Dai Nihon Seigidan (Greater Japan Justice Group, 1922), and Sekka Bōshidan—rather than the old Meiji-era nationalist organizations, such as the Kokuryūkai or the Gen’yōsha. Because of their stakes in the oil and fishery businesses, the old nationalist groups had generally supported recognition of the USSR, while both the conservative bureaucracy and the new Taishō nationalist groups shared an anticommunist and antisocialist animus and were ready to use violence and terror, primarily against the working class.

However, the murders of the union organizers and anarchists in 1923 had consequences because leftists pushed back, answering violence with violence. To avenge the murders, several of Ōsugi’s fellow anarchists organized the Girochinsha (Guillotine Group), which was responsible for attempting to murder Fukuda Masatarō (former martial law commander), blowing up a police station and a prison in Osaka, and setting off a bomb in a Ginza-area train. The whole group
(five people in Tokyo, sixteen in Kyoto and Osaka) was captured and tried in 1925, and most of them died in prison. But it was another incident that sent shockwaves through the bureaucracy. Angered by the brutal slaying of the Japanese leftists and Koreans, Nanba Daisuke, a young man whose father was a member of the House of Representatives, attempted in December 1923 to assassinate Crown Prince and Regent Hirohito (future Emperor Shōwa). The failed terrorist act, known as the Toranomon Incident, shook the political elite as an unexpected attack on the state and the monarchy, reminiscent of the High Treason Incident of 1910. Nanba acted alone and was not part of any terrorist ring, but he also confessed that he acted out of his communist conviction, was inspired by Kōtoku Shūsui’s alleged attempt on Emperor Meiji in 1910, and wanted to avenge Kōtoku. The direct inspiration came from the socialist Kawakami Hajime’s article, “Danpen,” published in the April 1921 issue of Kaizō magazine, in which Kawakami stressed the role of Russian terrorists in bringing about the Russian Revolution. Nanba Daisuke was promptly executed, and the conservative bureaucracy went to work pushing new anticommunist legislation.

The urgency seemed real, as the Justice Ministry reported that in Japan between 1922 and 1925 there were 291 incidents related to “social thought,” which involved the impressive number of 1,815 people. All of these incidents and people, the report stressed, were related to the Comintern and its agent within Japan, the JCP. Foreign Minister Shidehara, while pushing rapprochement with Russia, also agreed that some sort of radical thought-control mechanism should be in place at home. Ambassador to Poland Satō Naotake, who in 1918 as consul general in Harbin had pushed Foreign Minister Motono to start the Siberian Intervention, in 1924 was trying to convince Foreign Minister Shidehara that the Soviet government was simply an alias for the Comintern, intent on aggressive communist propaganda abroad. He advised the implementation of broad measures at home: the revision of school curricula to promote stronger loyalty, patriotism, and nationalism, coupled with aggressive anticommunist propaganda in the press. As the violence was escalating, not least because of direct (by the Comintern) or indirect (through literature) Russian encouragement, the government, it was widely realized, had to set legal boundaries of social and political dissent and reinforce a system of public policing.

In 1924, the Justice and Home ministries started to work on new antileftist legislation that would establish the national imperial polity as requiring protection against communism and criminalize socialist organizing. The Justice and Home ministries jointly introduced a bill to the Diet in February 1925, which was passed in March and enacted in April as the Peace Preservation Law (PPL). The PPL quickly developed into an extensive system of detention, surveillance, and “thought conversion” (tenkō) until its repeal in 1945. Article 1 stipulated: “Anyone who has
formed a society with the objective of altering the national polity (kokutai), or denying the system of private property (shiyū zaisan), and anyone who has joined such a society with full knowledge of its object, shall be liable to imprisonment with or without hard labor for a term not exceeding ten years.50

What was most significant in the law was that the term kokutai was used for the first time as a statutory concept.51 As Richard Mitchell demonstrates, since the PPL was intended primarily as a strong reaffirmation of the state’s basic unity and harmony, not as criminal legislation, “they could not have devised a better term; ‘kokutai’ in one word symbolized everything worth protecting.” Mitchell continues, “by the inclusion of ‘kokutai’ the government was telegraphing to all subjects its intention to preserve the Japanese way of life in the face of rapid change.”52 Legislators, however, had trouble defining kokutai because the term referred to both judicial and ethical spheres. On one hand, as in the Meiji Constitution, kokutai was defined in judicial terms; on the other hand, it designated something beyond law and history, some “transhistorical and transcendent ethical value that expressed the essential particularity of the Japanese nation.”53 Legislators therefore faced a peculiar conceptual conundrum, which was, in fact, raised by many who opposed the PPL and the general anticommunist and anti-Soviet trend, including Gotō Shinpei. If kokutai designates a transcendent ethical value peculiar to the Japanese nation, how is it possible for it to be under threat from communism? No one offered a satisfactory answer because the immediate objective of the authors of the PPL was to “demarcate the boundary between external dangerous thought and something essentially Japanese,” whatever the latter meant.54

Moreover, as happened during the debates over the Anti-Radical Bill in 1922, the bureaucrats had trouble defining different strands of leftist thought. In the end, the committee had decided not to use the words “anarchism” and “communism” because they had trouble with defining and distinguishing them. Instead, the committee used the phrase “altering the kokutai,” which had a broader meaning. Justice Minister Ogawa Heikichi cited the case of Nanba, who was at first an anarchist but ended up being a communist. “The communism which we most fear today is that of the so-called Russian Communist Party.” This kind of communism, he noted, planned “not just to equally divide property” but also to create a government “with absolute power held by laborers and farmers.” Ogawa held that it was a natural development for anarchists to turn to communism, since anarchism was inadequate.55 In preparing reports on anarchism and socialism, Justice Ministry staff used Marxist writings (both German and Russian) and, ironically, appropriated the socialist critique of anarchism as the correct one.

The passing of the PPL was in line with the traditional suppression of leftist opposition since the Meiji period, but in reality it was grounded in the specific
interwar crisis—to which, according to the state bureaucracy, the Russian Revolution greatly contributed. The enactment of the PPL coincided with the passing of a new suffrage law and the renewal of diplomatic relations with Russia. After the recognition of the USSR, it was expected that there would be an increase in the amount of radical thought entering Japan. Meanwhile, universal suffrage ensured that the election would no longer guarantee the victory of the establishment and conservative parties but would give way to oppositional or—even worse—proletarian parties. Therefore, the PPL was concerned with domestic instability, which was, as the conservative bureaucracy contended, a consequence of the infiltration of Russian communist ideas (the same line of thought as in the debates over the 1922 bill), rather than a result of the postwar economic and political crisis.

Despite the tradition of state suppression of the opposition, the road to the enactment of the PPL was not predetermined, and the law did not have universal support. It was enacted in response to intense pressure from the Privy Council and its head, Hiranuma Kiichirō. Hiranuma threatened to veto the universal manhood suffrage act in the Privy Council unless the government enacted the PPL. Hiranuma's and the Justice Ministry’s position was supported by some members of the Foreign Ministry (Uchida Kōsai and the consul general in Harbin), some members of the Tokyo Metropolitan Police Office (specifically those who surveilled anarchists), and certain industries. Confronted with Hiranuma’s blackmail, the Diet complied in order to push through the universal suffrage bill. When the public learned about the provisions of the proposed PPL, an opposition movement developed among labor groups, scholars, the press, and some members of opposition parties to repeal this “bad law” (akuho). Notably, among those who publicly opposed the PPL were liberal intellectuals and Diet members, Gotō Shinpei and those who supported rapprochement with Soviet Russia, and members of the police force who surveilled JCP members. The last of these groups maintained that the communist movement inside Japan was insignificant, and the PPL introduced unjustified and exceedingly harsh measures. None of these opponents was persuaded that Japan faced an external ideological threat. What concerned those who opposed the PPL was whether the law was intended as a countermeasure to the enactment of universal suffrage. The public outcry was largely over what effect the bill would have on public speech, academic research, and the reforms that were taking place in electoral policy, particularly in regard to the Universal Manhood Suffrage Act.

The committee responsible for drafting the law gave assurances to the Diet that the PPL was not directed against the expansion of political rights at home but rather targeted external radical threats. The committee specified that the law punished those involved in creating organizations and fomenting agitation.
Scholars and students would still be permitted to perform research and write studies dealing with anarchism, communism, and socialism and would be “free to announce the results of their research.” A crime would occur only when someone put subversive ideas into action. “Thus, if you are a scholar researching communism, with no intention of putting such ideas into practice, and then announce the results of your research, there is no connection with this law.” In this way, the committee’s insistence won support from the liberal opposition. Once the Universal Manhood Suffrage Act was enacted, liberal commentators were fairly quiet about the passage of the PPL. As noted above, they were convinced that the state ought to introduce police measures to end anarchist and communist subversive activities at home, which threatened the national community. Convinced that the state fundamentally served the best interests of the people, liberals could not imagine that the state would use the law as an instrument of violence against its own people.

I would agree with those historians who examine the passage of this far-reaching anticommunist legislation in relation to Japan’s foreign policy. The enactment of the PPL was directly related to the recognition of communist Russia in January 1925 and anxiety over the consequences it might bring to Japan. Discussion in the Diet prior to the enactment reveals the connection. When arguing for the passage of the law, Home Minister Wakatsuki Reijirō emphasized the danger posed by the recognition of the USSR, which would increase “opportunities for extremist activists” to enter Japan proper. Justice Minister Ogawa clarified that “in our country there are people gradually appearing who are trying to put anarchism and communism into practice.” He then gave an account of the development of the JCP, mentioning specific individuals and their increasing contacts with Soviet Russia. The main line of questioning in the Diet revolved around the law’s effectiveness against foreign ideologies, and whether thought was something that could even be regulated; to which Ogawa replied with the same repetitive argument that “These agitators are people greatly to be feared, since we cannot give them the proper punishment for this kind of terrible crime. . . . Under present conditions, there is no law to properly punish this kind of dangerous action.” The foreignness of communism was emphasized in the understanding that those Japanese who were implicated in communist activities ceased to be Japanese. For example, a 1930 Tokkō (thought police) manual clarified that “Anyone against our system . . . is not only disloyal, but ceases to be Japanese.” When someone pointed out that Japan had assimilated many foreign thoughts, such as Confucianism and Buddhism, the proponents of the PPL in the Diet replied that anarchism and communism “are not things that can be assimilated within Japan’s fundamental social structure.”
The anxiety over the Soviet Union's interference in Japan's domestic policies had never abated. In February 1928, Japan held its first general election after the enactment of the Universal Manhood Suffrage Act, which raised the number of eligible voters from three million to thirteen million, although women still could not vote. In the general election, half a million votes were cast for the proletarian parties. The proletarian Labor-Farmer Party gained two seats in the Diet. These results caused increased concern in government circles that the revolutionary movement might get out of hand. The real problem was that the Home Ministry suspected that the winning proletarian parties were sponsored by the Comintern. The government mouthpiece *Japan Weekly Chronicle* speculated about the existence of some communist plot to explain such success.65 As a consequence of anti-Soviet paranoia, on March 15, 1928, the police began a nationwide roundup—1,568 leftists were arrested, and proletarian parties and labor unions were banned.66 The Ministry of Justice released a statement to clarify the basis of the government repression:

> The Communist Party of Japan, as the Japanese branch of the revolutionary proletarian world party, the Third International, is luring our empire into the whirlpool of world revolution. It strives to change fundamentally the perfect, unblemished character of our nation and to establish a dictatorship of workers and farmers. In line with its basic policy, the Party stands with Soviet Russia and advocates complete independence for the colonies.67

Mass arrests of JCP members and socialists continued for another year, and general suppression and harassment was vigorous throughout the wartime period.

Tanaka Gi’ichi, prime minister and foreign minister since April 1927, together with the Home and Justice ministries, devised and introduced into the Diet a revision of the PPL, which would have made attempting to change the *kokutai* a capital offense. The Diet disapproved, but Tanaka gained the cooperation of the Privy Council, and the revised PPL was issued as Emergency Imperial Ordinance No. 129 and temporarily put into effect in June 1928, pending formal approval of the revision by the Diet in January of the following year.68 Tanaka argued with his opponents in the Diet, citing that the Soviet danger had been confirmed by information emerging from the investigations of those recently apprehended in the 1928 arrests. As Tanaka explained, Soviet representatives were operating inside the country, trying to infiltrate Japan through the Comintern and the JCP.69 Justice Minister Hara Yoshimichi also insisted that the foreign threat originated in Moscow, then traveled through the Comintern and arrived at its domestic source in the Japanese Communist Party.70
But what was most significant in the revised PPL was that crimes against the 
kokutai and “private property system” were separated into their own respective 
clauses, with the “alteration of the kokutai” infringement becoming punishable 
by death, while an infringement against the private property clause retained its 
two-year prison sentence. The only time when the “denial of the private prop-
erty” clause was applied was in December 1925, with the arrests of students from 
Kyoto Imperial University and Doshisha University who were engaged in politi-
cal activities within the Student Federation of Social Science (Gakusei shakai-
kaigaku kenkyūkai, or Gakuren). From that time until its repeal in 1945, almost 
all of the more than sixty-eight thousand arrests under the PPL were based on the 
kokutai clause.71 In effect, the 1928 revision signaled that kokutai was the central 
objective of the PPL, demarcating the boundary between dangerous thought and 
that which needed to be protected. The government, liberals, and nationalists 
were anxious about the unity and coherence of the national community rather 
than the defense of the capitalist economic system.

The 1928 revision signaled that the conservative bureaucracy and the military 
(Tanaka Gi’ichi was, after all, a man of the army) had abandoned the defense of 
capitalism. Quite to the contrary, by the end of the 1920s, as the Shōwa Financial 
Crisis of 1927 was unfolding, Japanese leaders scorned laissez-faire economics 
and urged business to redouble its devotion to the state and community. The 
business elite found itself rejected by the Left, Radical Right, conservatives, and 
military. Similar to criticism from the Left, groups on the right criticized busi-
ness for its preoccupation with profit, but they also pointed to the failure of 
business to embody the traditional values of selflessness, familism, paternalism, 
cooperation, and spirituality. Although business traditionally had emphasized 
its dedication to the common good, on one hand, during the 1920s businessmen 
found themselves forced to underscore more forcefully their rejection of eco-
nomic individualism in favor of traditional collectivist values. On the other hand, 
carefully cultivated images of patriotic dedication enabled big business to blunt 
the demands of social critics clamoring for labor laws and unions. Welding “dis-
sectively Japanese” norms to employer–employee relations management could 
stigmatize social legislation inspired by “alien” leftist ideals of workers’ rights.72 
That being said, in its campaign against communism the conservative bureau-
cracy was able to convert big business into its collaborator in the revivification 
of traditional values.

As a consequence of the 1928 revision of the PPL, the responsibilities of the 
thought-control police and the military police greatly expanded; agents of the 
Tokkō police were now in major world cities, such as Beijing, Shanghai, Harbin, 
Berlin, London, New York, and Chicago. In expanding police activities overseas, 
the Home and Justice ministries received support from the Foreign Ministry,
too. Thought study groups were formed in both the Home and Justice ministries in order to better understand the various genealogies of “dangerous thought”; police agents began to specialize in particular movements and the history and organization of political groups—such as anarchism, socialism, communism, Korean and Taiwanese nationalist movements, rightist movements, and labor unions. Finally, the issue of clarifying the essence of the Japanese state’s sovereignty converged in the mid-1930s with the infamous “movement to clarify the kokutai” (kokutai meichō undo) and the Ministry of Education’s publication in 1937 of Kokutai no Hongi (The fundamental principles of the kokutai).73 In the 1930s, the PPL evolved into one of the most important tools of the state to control any dissent—from the Radical Left, liberals, and the Radical Right.

Because Russian communism was considered to be an external foreign threat, it prompted liberals and conservatives alike to reckon with what was under threat, how to define the national community and body politic, and what was the “fundamental structure of our society” that was incompatible with the principles of communism. Faced with these issues, during the 1920s anxiety on the part of the government, conservatives, and liberals shifted from preoccupation with the foreign threat to the realization that modern Japanese society lacked a viable and comprehensive understanding of what was the national community, how to define it, and what was required from a national/imperial subject. In the effort to respond to international communism, various programs of liberal paternalism, spiritual mobilization, and cultural regeneration were worked out—ranging from liberal nationalist to conservative to fascist, including the state’s own program for reforming those who strayed. The tragedy of interwar liberalism in Japan was that in its keen efforts to distance itself from socialism and communism and in its promotion of a comprehensive national ideological framework, it inadvertently contributed to the emergence of a police state in Japan in the 1930s. Thus, originating in the anxiety over the “communist menace,” the PPL policy, with the silent approval of liberal commentators, finally evolved into what is known as the tenkō, or “thought conversion” policy, when so-called “thought criminals” were forced to abandon their support of Western leftist and later liberal political thought systems and profess their dedication not simply to the national community but to Japan’s imperial expansion and war abroad, understood as indispensable to the survival of that community.74