



# Rebels in Kyoto

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It is the night before another antiwar demonstration and a half a dozen students—long-haired, bearded, blue-jeaned and sandaled—are painting placards and writing propaganda in one of the rooms of the student hall of Doshisha University. In a few hours they will board a slow train to Tokyo (they do not have enough money for the *shinkansen*, or bullet) and will join thousands of their contemporaries in a carefully orchestrated melee around one of the large stations, probably Shinjuku, favorite haunt of the young and the mod. It will not be a major demonstration resulting in mass arrests and injuries. It will barely delay trains and blockade traffic for two or three hours—enough for page one of the national papers, enough to remind everyone that radical youth is not entirely dead, enough for middle-class, nonviolent Japan to recall with shrugs of remorse and distaste the bloody excesses of the past year.

A little more than five years have gone by since the beginning of the third stage of postwar radicalism in Japan. If the movement is still alive, however, it survives more on memories of past glory than on current mass appeal. On the ivied brick-and-stone campus of Doshisha, once the heart of the most extreme radical factions, students tend to talk of study and job prospects rather than public meetings and rock-throwing protests. In the student hall, focal point of all extracurricular activities on campus, signs advertise concerts and plays, lectures on art and literature, language classes and study groups. Only on the second floor, in the littered meeting rooms of the protest organizations, does one see reminders of the movement that roiled almost every university in Japan and closed down most of them, including this one, for several weeks in 1969.

"Let us unite to prevent U.S. forces from going to Okinawa," says one fading sign splashed in red in Japanese characters. "Be careful of policemen, especially when talking among yourselves," advises another. Several signs are more explicit: "Attack," "Peace," "Red Army," "Unity." "We shall fight," "The revolution is truth," say more signs—these in brown paint on the dusty, graying wall. Another series of characters soars to even greater heights. "Forget our revolution, forget love affairs, forget justice," it says, "but don't forget revolt"—a reminder of the glorious sense among some students that the only way to move modern Japan is to overthrow the government by force. The signs may be old but the rebels preparing for tomorrow's demonstration still are intoxicated by the distant prospect of armed revolution of their own.

"There are many kinds of violence," pontificates a talkative "student" wearing a paint-smeared T-shirt with a peace symbol sewn on it. "We are more

concerned about the quality of violence than just violence. In 1969 we used stones, sticks and iron pipes, but there must be some other way." Although registered as a sophomore at Doshisha, he seldom attends classes. Instead he works part time in restaurants and factories while attempting to restructure some of the odd fragments of the widely diffused, disorganized left wing. For his model he cites *Rengo Sekigun*, the United Red Army, most violent of the extreme leftist groups, spawned on the campuses of Kyoto and Osaka and finally destroyed by its own blood feuding. "*Rengo Sekigun* provided the first case in the class conflict in Japan in which people used guns to fight," he observes. "We think we should succeed them. We must use guns to bring about our revolution."

It is difficult to take the young man seriously. He talks so rapidly, glibly and willingly that my interpreter, who herself had participated in the 1969 riots at Sofia University in Tokyo, can barely resist laughter. Yet just such disaffected, loquacious, intense men and women as he had formed the original *Sekigun*, or Red Army, precursor of *Rengo Sekigun*, after the failure of the 1969 riots. "They became much more isolated and dogmatic," explains Jiro Inuma, professor at the Institute of Humanistic Studies at Kyoto University and a leader of *Baheirin*, Citizens' League for Peace in Vietnam, a nonviolent organization that once sheltered American G.I.'s AWOL from bases in Japan. "They think they are the real leaders, but they have lost contact with the people. As they become fewer and fewer, they must take more extreme radical action. The fault lies with both the students and the government. As the capitalist society progresses, the individual becomes part of an enormous machine—and loses individuality. This is the basic reason for such radical action."

On the quiescent campus of Doshisha, one of the radicals angrily criticizes other leftist intellectuals and politicians for espousing "reform within the parliamentary system." The only real solution, he says, is to wipe out the ruling Liberal-Democratic Party—which controls the diet, or parliament, by a wide majority. "We consider that power exists not only in parliament but in rioting against the militarist trend now emerging in Japan," says the student, son of a retail clothing merchant in Osaka. "Those who seek militant action will win over the moderates."

It is a full generation since the Japanese Communist Party (JCP) signaled the opening of the first stage of the leftist struggle by encouraging the formation of *Zengakuren*, the National Federation of Student Self-Government Associations, on virtually every campus in the country. The JCP, previously accused of passivism, introduced a policy of violence at the outset of the Korean War and led a wave of bloody riots against the signing of the Japanese-American Security Treaty in 1953. The

Party reverted to respectable nonviolence in the mid-1950's, however, and extreme radicals have denounced it ever since as an establishment organization that betrayed their cause. "The conservative government carried out a program of rapid growth from 1945 on," notes Ray Moore, an Amherst professor and Japanese linguist teaching this year at Doshisha. "The effect was to undercut the appeal of the Communists. They could not think of themselves as a revolutionary force in a peasant society."

The left wing of Japan has divided and subdivided into more than a hundred factions, many of them implacably hostile toward each other, but in all its convolutions its most radical adherents have been isolated intellectuals, often from quite affluent backgrounds, in revolt against their peers. In the drive for purity of thought and spirit the United Red Army literally committed suicide in January and February, 1972, with the "execution" of a dozen of its own members for ideological "errors." Then, in February of last year, *Rengo Sekigun*, which never consisted of more than three hundred hardcore fanatics, lost whatever public sympathy it might have had over the course of a nine-day shootout in a vacant villa in the mountain resort of Karuizawa, north of Tokyo. While the whole country witnessed the performance, broadcast live on four television networks, hundreds of policemen surrounded the villa, hosed and teargassed it and finally flushed out the holdouts in foot-by-foot fighting that cost the lives of two police officers.

"*Rengo Sekigun* no longer has much influence on what's happening on campus today," says Atsushi Mizobuchi, an editor of the student paper at Doshisha. "Until the Karuizawa incident, most of the people on the paper were members of *Sekigun*. Now they've all been purged. The general impression of people is the Red Army faction was still more isolated by failure." The revulsion of the editor is probably typical of that of Japanese students, resigned to another lull in between stages of their revolution. At the same time, his outlook may typify the sense of rebelliousness that permeates the thinking even of those who themselves would not engage in more than pro forma, organized and nonviolent demonstrations. "This prosperity in Japan is very superficial," he says. "I don't think it can go on. I think the 'revolution' will still occur, some time, in some way."

In an era of unprecedented economic expansion, however, it is difficult to convince most Japanese of this hypothesis. The rise of the Japanese economy, growing at a rate of more than 10 per cent a year, by itself seems to offer popular proof of the vacuity of the campaigns and slogans of the New Left. One of the problems, in fact, is the rebels' dire need of an issue. They had the Japanese-American treaty in the early 1950's and had it all over again in the second stage of the struggle, in which half a million

rioters forced cancellation of President Eisenhower's trip to Tokyo in 1960. The Vietnam war offered an obvious rallying cry in the late 1960's, and Okinawa was even more potent in terms of popular nationalist appeal. The third stage really began, in the view of both leftists and police officials, on October 8, 1967, the day the students staged a riotous struggle around Tokyo's Haneda Airport as Prime Minister Eisaku Sato left for Washington to negotiate the reversion of Okinawa from American to Japanese control.

Not until after the automatic renewal of the security treaty, on June 23, 1970, did the most violent revolutionaries and anarchists rise to leadership over the entire movement. "The extreme leftist students refused to accept any orders from the Japan Communist Party," says Atsuyuki Sassa, a polished Tokyo University graduate and superintendent in the Tokyo Metropolitan Police Department. "All the students were depressed and disappointed because they couldn't realize their goals. Many of them left the movement and returned to study. Members of *Sekigun* and other extreme dissidents despised the mainstream for quitting the struggle, for not wanting to use Molotov cocktails. They adopted terrorism—with handmade bombs and firearms." Sassa, who personally led police forces on the scene of the siege at Karuizawa, holds *Rengo Sekigun* responsible for 132 cases of shooting or exploding devices of one sort or another over the past year. There have been 521 arrests of *Sekigun* members—"some of them the same people repeatedly," says Sassa.

Perhaps the most bizarre aspect of the original Red Army's search for an issue was—and is—its internationalism. A crudely printed leaflet with a photograph of a Molotov cocktail on the cover expounds on the international approach by which *Sekigun* leaders dream of touching off worldwide revolution. "Let's organize, organize and organize the World Communist Party—the World Red Army—the World Revolutionary Front and wage the World Revolutionary War," the leaflet exhorts. Ominously for the future of the New Left, the authors reveal neither repentance nor regret for *Rengo Sekigun's* worst disaster, the Lod Airport massacre at the end of May, 1972, in which three Japanese fired blindly into the crowd, killing twenty-six persons and wounding more than seventy others. If the leaflet displays any sense of guilt, it is for the abject failure of the shooting to win any sympathy at home rather than for the taut, merciless ideological outlook that encouraged it.

"After the three militants of the World Red Army attacked the Lod Airport in Tel Aviv, Japanese imperialists noisily clamored about 'the respect of the human life,'" says the leaflet, possibly produced by underground leftists at Kyoto University, Japan's most prestigious institute of higher learning after

Tokyo University and a traditional center of anti-government sentiment. "This 'respect of the human life' is a trickery," the leaflet goes on. "Israel is the most reactionary basement which stands against the interest of the Arab people and the Arab Revolution and for the bourgeois class. So they want to unite firm with Israel. This is the true meaning of 'the respect of the human life.'"

It was logical, in view of *Sekigun's* proclivity for drastic action, that some of its members should have been drawn almost instinctively to another violence-prone organization, the *Keihin Ampo-kyoto*, or Joint Struggle Committee Against the Security Treaty. In fact, *Keihin Ampo's* ideological stance is quite different from that of *Sekigun* in that it advocates armed revolt among the Japanese masses regardless of world revolution. Outbalancing such cosmic issues, however, was the gall displayed by *Keihin Ampo* "commandoes" in raiding small police stations, breaking into gunshops and tossing Molotov cocktails onto American bases. Bound by their common belief in the coming of a full-fledged "era of bombs," the "Central Army" of *Sekigun* and the "People's Revolutionary Army" of *Keihin Ampo* merged on July 15, 1971, in the form of *Rengo Sekigun*, United Red Army.

"Long Live the Action of the Three Militants at Tel Aviv," shouts a *Sekigun* leaflet, "Long Live the Memory of Those Who Fell Fighting Against Israel and World Imperialism! Long Live the Militant Solidarity Among the Peoples of the World!" Beneath the defiance, however, the remnants of *Sekigun* are engaging in an ordeal of self-criticism unprecedented in the Japanese leftist movement since World War II. From the Kansai committee of *Sekigun*, still meeting secretly, has emanated an analysis of the brutally rigid theoretical view that culminated in the executions of *Rengo Sekigun* members in the mountains near Karuizawa. "*Sekigun* hoped thoroughly to implement the principle of proletarian discipline in the party-army by purifying the army into the party itself," says the analysis, one of many self-criticisms issued by individuals and factions of *Sekigun*, "but it allowed this effort to become distorted into a censuring of the personal qualities of the members. Such conduct originated in *Sekigun's* failure to overcome its limitation as part of the New Left movement, which basically was a movement of students and intellectuals."

In the agony of reorganization and recrimination the members of *Sekigun* have gone into such deep hiding that Police Superintendent Sassa complains he can no longer obtain much useful information on them. "In 1969 we had enough to raid one of their camps in the mountains and arrest fifty-three of them," says Sassa, "but now they meet only in three's and four's. We don't know where they are." If the Red Army has vanished from public



view, however, it is still possible, through intermediaries, to meet sympathizers and members. At a leftist publishing house in Shinjuku I contact two young adherents who gladly discuss their aims. "We need a professionally trained military corps for a guerrilla-style struggle," says one of them, who has adopted the alias of Yokoiyama. "Now is the time for more militaristic struggle," echoes Matsumoto, also an alias, sitting beside him in a coffee shop. "Our tactics are based on the complete destruction of the enemy in a military fight."

Matsumoto and Yokoiyama seem representative of the type of young Japanese who form the nucleus of the far left in a period of decline and disillusionment. Now in his mid-twenties, Matsumoto attended Tokyo Chemical and Science University for two or three years before his expulsion for leading protest demonstrations on campus. He talks in a hard, businesslike manner of the demise of *Rengo Sekigun* and the prospects for a fourth stage in the leftist revolution. "*Sekigun* lacked unity," says Matsumoto. "If we are not prepared to unite, we will divide into more factions—and our movement will cease to exist. Since *Rengo Sekigun* was destroyed, we believe we must form a new military organization." Matsumoto, wearing tweed jacket and turtleneck shirt, gestures expressively with his left arm. He lost the right one in a fall three years ago jumping from roof to roof

to outmaneuver policemen chasing him from a demonstration. "They refused to take me to a doctor until I gave them my name," says Matsumoto, "I resisted until I passed out. I was in a hospital for six months and in jail for ten."

In their own lives Matsumoto and Yokoiyama both confirm the sense of isolation that drives Japanese radicals to combat the massive "establishment" of government and business as fervently as most Japanese work to support it. "When I came from my home in the country to the city, I noticed the compromises in our society," says Matsumoto, whose father owns a small farm. "The majority of activists are not from wealthy families but from relatively poor ones," he insists. "They see the problems that our society presents for them, especially for those without privileges." More than Matsumoto, Yokoiyama epitomizes the quandry of the individual against the machine. "My father died. I didn't have enough money to go to college," he says. "I was never paid enough for my work. I was discriminated against because of lack of education. I worked on the assembly line at the Nissan automotive plant. When the belt moved too slowly, one of the inspectors sped it up. Company restrictions were very tight."

So Yokoiyama, still in his early twenties, shy, bespectacled, introspective, quit to work full time for a relief organization that specializes entirely in offering food, funds and shelter for radicals on the run from police. "We exist entirely on donations," he says. "We do not care which organization the radicals represent. We try to discuss and solve the problems of every faction in order to understand each other. Each one has its own view of tactics, but at least we communicate. Our purpose is to unite in new military activities." It is indicative of the disarray of the far left, however, that many of its urban guerrillas and political propagandists operate independently, often unaware of what each other is doing. Matsumoto and Yokoiyama themselves leave an impression of indecision and weakness behind vaguely formed dreams. One suspects they personally may represent at best a score of followers, all of them too closely watched by the police to do much except spread clandestine propaganda and gather occasionally in obscure little coffee shops.

"We don't have any particular schedule because all of these movements are now in confusion," confesses a young *Sekigun* leader whom I met through a newspaper reporter specializing in left-wing activities. A metropolitan official by day, he devotes his spare time to "organizing civilians"—mainly by writing and editing a pro-*Sekigun* magazine appropriately named *Phoenix*, for the mythological bird that rises from its ashes. In a cold, clinical way he discusses the impact of Karuizawa on the Japanese left. "The tragedy," he says, "was that it forced the entire leftist movement a step backwards. The defeat of *Rengo Sekigun* discouraged all leftist organizations." The immediate

problem, in his view, is to "rebuild from the beginning." Then, "when we are technically fully ready," he predicts, "we will engage in armed struggle to win."

The *Sekigun* leader, in the inner circle of "political" (as opposed to "military") organizers, exudes the appearance of a typical bureaucrat in coat and tie, white shirt and cuff links. Son of a writer, he resigned from a prefectural university in the Kansai region at the request of academic authorities after having led a series of demonstrations. He is probably more influential than Matsumoto and Yokoiyama, but he also betrays the same sense of frustration and uncertainty beneath the bravado. "We used to think we should function as shock therapy in this capitalist system," he says. "Now we don't try to make hot news. We are waiting for the situation to mature before the final revolution." It may be a sign of the lack of real organization among new leftists that members of another grouping called the Black Helmets are still almost haphazardly exploding bombs on an average of one a month. "This year we've had seventy-two wounded because of them—twice as many as last year," says Superintendent Sassa. "Now is the time for the anarchists. They are more desperate, more radical as a result of their defeats."

From an altogether different perspective, however, at least one acute observer finds reasons to believe that eventually a "new New Left" will supplant the kaleidoscopic spectrum that exists today and will seriously challenge the conservative regime. At the Unita Bookshop, named for the journal of the Italian Communist Party, manager Tadao Endo notes that readers are buying many more serious works on Marxism-Leninism now than they were at the peak of the protest era in the late 1960's. "I have a feeling that this trend will eventually lead to more academic thought," says Endo, a one-time Communist Party member who opened the shop in Tokyo's Kanda district after resigning from the Communist Party some twenty years ago. "The long-range result will be to deepen and enlarge the leftist movement." Endo reports that some of the heaviest readers are students or recent graduates. "The movement from 1968 to 1969 ended in anarchistic confusion," he says, "but the readers of these basic materials are the same people who experienced defeat."

Endo is particularly impressed by a general shift in preferences among extremists. "Previously they were interested in notes and essays," he says, "but now they are examining the original theses by Marx and Lenin. It is very important that those who once were leaders of demonstrations are seeking some remedial effect by basic reading." In the process of self-doubt and study, however, left-wing leaders must somehow find a cause of wide national interest. Only 1,500 persons turned out for a meeting on October

21, international antiwar day, in a park behind the National Defense Agency headquarters in Tokyo. Rallies the same day in Kyoto, Osaka and Tokyo attracted perhaps 100,000 demonstrators—half as many as last year. On a street corner in Kyoto, passersby stare in boredom at half a dozen students talking into loudspeakers and handing out leaflets. “We protest against the American imperialistic invasion of Indochina,” says a smiling student from Doshisha, but deescalation of the war and reversion of Okinawa from American to Japanese control on May 15 have deprived the left of two of their best issues.

So where can the rebels turn? “The frustration of the younger generation still exists,” says Superintendent Sassa. “As long as it is there, they will reorganize—provided they find some good cause.” Sassa hopes “the energy of the student movement will remain in a state of depression for the next two or three years,” but he has few illusions about the chances for permanent quietude. In the end the seeds of the fourth stage of the leftist movement may lie in the 1984-type society perceived in the grand plan of Prime Minister Kakuei Tanaka for “Remodeling the Japanese Archipelago,” the title of the best-selling book in which he outlines his ideas for building new cities, industries, transportation networks, communication facilities and the like. “If you read Tanaka’s plan, it’s frightening,” says Ichiyo Muto, the *Baheirin* writer. “He is proposing a whole mode of life. It’s a crazy plan to impose on the people. Tensions will inevitably grow. The question in the movement is how to come to grips with the building of tension.”

Muto, thoughtful, highly literate in both English and Japanese, suggests that new leftists should focus almost entirely on “civil movements” and “people’s struggles” against selected aspects of government or establishment wrongdoing. He points out, for instance, that farmers in one prefecture are demonstrating against expansion of nearby industry while fishermen in another are suing to stop chemical pollution from factories. “The movement has just begun,” he says. “The question is how to form a broad front of resistance at the start.” It is difficult, however, to view Muto as really a radical organizer. Expelled from Tokyo University some twenty years ago for calling “illegal meetings,” he channels his anger and bitterness in “constructive” opposition. “*Rengo Sekigun* is the aftermath of the spirit of the 60’s,” he reasons. “Its violence came from its failure. It was the release of tension in irrelevant form.”

In a pause in the conversation, a girl sitting beside us in a coffee shop below a *Baheirin* office turning

out antiwar pamphlets for G.I.’s argues “the mentality of *Sekigun* is still very strong among young people.” The Red Army was “too aggressive and radical,” she says, “but it has appealed to young people who feel some frustration, rejection of reality. It has convinced many of them.” Not long after our meeting, students at Waseda University, an old-time radical center in Tokyo, seize a member of a rival faction and “try” him in a classroom for twelve hours. Later police find his bruised body, battered by wooden staves. “It is almost beyond our comprehension that people are capable of committing such a brutal and merciless murder in this country in peacetime,” editorializes *Mainichi Shimbun*, one of Japan’s enormous national dailies. “The murderers are undoubtedly mentally and psychologically abnormal. Not only their university education but their entire upbringing since childhood must be questioned.”

The incident is particularly poignant to me because only a few weeks before I was discussing the leftist movement on campus with one of the deans at Waseda. “There are 40,000 students here,” he told me. “There are various opinions among them. The extremists are quite a minority.” The dean conceded the existence of “latent potentiality for violence” but advocated tolerance of leftist activity “as long as there is no threat to the life of people or destruction of school buildings.” A young assistant professor, Joji Mori, assured me that Waseda students were “studying hard” these days in contrast to the period of violence and classroom disruption several years ago. Indeed, after the killing on campus several hundred students surrounded a group of extremists and demanded “an open discussion” on the reasons for it. Leaders of the group hastily promised “self-reflection” before breaking away on the pretext that police were outside the gates.

After *Rengo Sekigun*, one wonders if such bursts of cruelty are merely “aberrations”—or expressions of latent fanaticism among perhaps a majority of Japanese youth. “Around the most radical students there are sympathetic ones—nonpolitical radicals,” says Sampei Koseki, a sociology professor whom I meet in Kyoto. “The individual doesn’t exist in a strict sense in Japan. We live in a modern society. The most important thing about the student movement is not the ideology but a new way of thinking. They cannot stand an overcontrolled society. They see their future and do not like it.” On the campuses of Kyoto and Tokyo it is too early to discern the real drift of the radical left. One senses with some certainty, however, that it is undying—and may some day erupt in outbreaks of far greater import than those seemingly “isolated incidents” of 1972.