

# THE SOKA GAKKAI AND THE JAPANESE LOCAL ELECTIONS OF 1960

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## **Rationale for Sōka Gakkai Political Activity**

For the past few years, before and after each national election, much has been written about the political activities of the Sōka Gakkai, but very little has been said about the reasons for this activity and the religious and political ideas on which it is based. However, it should be obvious that an understanding of the reasons for the Sōka Gakkai entering the political arena is necessary for a correct interpretation of this activity. The Sōka Gakkai has frequently been criticized for its political activity on the grounds that a religious organization has no business acting as a political party. Such criticism ignores the whole history of the Nichiren Buddhist tradition out of which the Sōka Gakkai springs.

Nichiren himself knew no dividing line between political activity and religious activity. His philosophy on this point is made explicit in the *Risshō Ankoku Ron* which, stated in its most simple form, says that a country can only have peace and stability when it is founded on righteousness, on the true faith. Since the calamities which come upon a country are the result of forsaking the true religion, the state has a duty to support the true faith.

This philosophy is worked out in more detail in the *Sandai Hihō Bonjōji*; in which Nichiren discusses the fusion of the

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political law and the Buddha law (*Ōbutsu Myōgō*). The Sōka Gakkai claims that this is the guiding directive for their political activities. The fusion of politics and religion is a direct order from Nichiren himself. Present leaders say that the elucidation of this teaching is the most important contribution which the late President Toda made to the organization. They say that if the political leadership of Japan is not grounded in the true Buddhism, statesmen cannot give proper direction to the affairs of this country.

Inherent in this philosophy is a paternalistic view of the state. A good politician is compared to a good father, who cares for his family, and works for the well-being of all of the members of his family. Sōka Gakkai writers point to periods of cultural flowering in China and Japan and maintain that these were also periods when the true Buddhism (reverence for the Lotus Sutra) flourished. In the present age, too, only the Lotus Sutra (as expounded by the Nichiren Shō Sect) can save Japan and the world.

In present day Japan, since sovereignty resides in the people, it is not enough to lead the emperor or political leaders to the true faith, say the Sōka Gakkai leaders. The people as a whole must recognize the virtue of the Nichiren Shō Sect and worship its object of worship (*honzon*). The population as a whole must make the true Buddhism the basis of their lives. Thus the daily winning of converts is an integral part of this fusing of politics and religion. The placing of capable believers in organs of government is another part of this same activity and is done for the same reasons. President Ikeda has said, "The aim of our Sōka Gakkai election activities is the realization of

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the great ideal of Nichiren, the fusion of politics and religion.”

The Sōka Gakkai understanding of democracy and democratic government was elucidated in a symposium in the June, 1963, issue of *Dai Byaku Renge*, a monthly publication of the Sōka Gakkai; this sheds further light on the political philosophy of this group. It traces modern democracy back to the French revolution and sees Christianity as the enemy of democracy in Europe. Western democracy is based on the idea of freedom, but it is only freedom of choice and cannot guarantee happiness. “Real freedom is that which enables us to rise above all hindrances and solve all difficulties.” This, according to the writers, comes in true Buddhism. “When a man becomes identified with the universe in the Buddha law and adjusts to its rhythm, he can overcome anything which would hinder his freedom.”

Two kinds of modern democracy are traced in this article — bourgeois democracy which maintains freedom at the expense of equality, and proletarian democracy which maintains equality at the expense of freedom. In the democracy which comes through the true Buddhism, both freedom and equality are maintained. Equality as found in the writings of Nichiren is viewed as basic to democracy. “In spreading the doctrine of the Lotus Sutra, there is no distinction between male and female.” “If men recite the *Myōhō-rence-kyō* and worship the true *honzon*, they receive the same reward whether they are male or female, old or young, sick, in prison or whatever their condition.” The writers note that while early Buddhism in India was limited to a certain people at a certain place and time, Nichiren’s Buddhism can save all men anywhere at any

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time. This is true equality.

Noting that respect for life is also important in democracy, the writers point out that Marxism claims respect for man but disregards the rights of the individual, while capitalism is built on the sacrifice of certain individuals for others. Thus, they say, "The only reason for having respect for man is found in the Buddha teaching, 'All men are equally partakers of the Buddha nature.'" The Buddha nature is defined as the power to grasp absolute well-being for oneself and to give it to others. This comes through the philosophy of Nichiren which then is said to be the only real basis for democracy. This leads to the conclusion that real democracy can only develop through the Sōka Gakkai. Through the political activity of the Sōka Gakkai, as politics and the true Buddhism are fused, real democracy will come to Japan. Japan can then lead the world toward real democracy. "Neither communism nor capitalism can solve all the problems of all men. Only the philosophy of the Sōka Gakkai which embraces and harmonizes both the materialism of communism and the idealism of the free world can do this."

From the above, the absence of anything which could be called a concrete political philosophy is quite apparent. All will come through Buddhist philosophy, but there is nothing here which a non-believer can clearly grasp, no logical resolution of the tension between capitalism and socialism, between freedom and equality. Apparently this only comes in a religious experience which must be experienced to be understood. As such it seems incapable of political classification and analysis.

### **Past Political Activity**

The Sōka Gakkai first directly entered the political picture in Japan in the local elections of 1955. In that election one man was elected to the Tokyo Prefectural Assembly and ninety men to city and ward assemblies, largely in the Tokyo area. In 1959, the next time that local elections were held on a large scale, four men were elected to the Tokyo Prefectural Assembly and 293 men won seats in prefectural, city and ward assemblies throughout Japan.

On the national scene, the Sōka Gakkai has nominated candidates for the House of Councillors in each election since 1956. In that year five candidates were nominated and three elected. In 1957 a Sōka Gakkai candidate in a special election from the Osaka district was defeated in an election which became a scandal because of large-scale election law violations on the part of the Sōka Gakkai. This election seems to have marked a turning point in Sōka Gakkai tactics, and election law violations by Sōka Gakkai members have decreased markedly since that time. In the 1963 local elections, the Sōka Gakkai published a guide for its members outlining what could and could not be done under the election law.

In the next regular election in 1959, six candidates were nominated and elected to the Upper House. In the last election in 1962, nine candidates were nominated and elected. At the present time the Sōka Gakkai has fifteen members in the House of Councillors, who are organized into a political organization called the Kōmei Kai (League of Fair Statesmen).

### Aims and Platform for the 1963 Local Elections

The political arm of the Sōka Gakkai, the Kōmei Seiji Remmei (Fair Politics League — abbreviated as Kōseiren), set up three slogans for the 1963 local elections. They were 1) Kōseiren, the pillar of Japan; 2) Kōseiren, the corrective for corrupt politics; and 3) Kōseiren, the power which produces happiness. Slogans two and three are the two prongs of the approach which the Sōka Gakkai made in this election — a clean-up of the present political scene in Japan and a somewhat mystical approach to the development of human happiness and well-being.

The Kōmei Seiji Remmei gives three principles as the basis for its activities.

1. “The present politicians, whether conservative or progressive, are absorbed in factionalism and party affairs, have forgotten the welfare of the Japanese people, and are becoming increasingly isolated from them. This we deeply deplore.
2. “The Kōmei Seiji Remmei is fundamentally different from these politicians. Its policies, based on the principle that the prosperity of society is identical with the happiness of the individual, are moving forward, working not only for the real happiness and prosperity of the Japanese people, but also for the realization of peace for all the people of the world.
3. “Our political ideals are based on the spirit of Nichiren’s *Risshō Ankoku Ron*, our basis is this ultimate expression in philosophy and mercy. In their modern application we

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act as a completely democratic political organization, promising to take a stern attitude toward iniquity wherever we find it.”

The platform on which the candidates of the Kōmei Seiji Remmei stood in the local elections had four planks.

1. “Opposition to Nuclear Weapons — We are opposed to the manufacture, testing and use of nuclear weapons for any reason. We declare that it should be resolved in the name of all mankind that those responsible for the use of such weapons in war should be put to death as devils who have denied the right of mankind to exist. This anti-nuclear movement should be resolutely carried out for world peace and human happiness without leaning to one ‘ism’ or another.
2. “Opposition to a Retrogressive Revision in the Constitution — We will protect the Constitution of Japan which has as its fundamental spirit the sovereignty of the people and the renunciation of war, and from our own impartial and individual position we oppose any retrogressive revision.
3. “Clean Elections and the Clean-up of Politics — In order to correct the present political corruption which is based on factionalism, the power of money, and influence, we aim at clean elections and a clean-up in the political world.
4. “The Establishment of the Autonomy of the House of Councillors — The present House of Councillors is only an extension of the House of Representatives and the essence of a bicameral legislature is gradually disappearing. The Kōmei Seiji Remmei opposes the entrance of party politics into the House of Councillors and will work for

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the establishment of the autonomy of the House of Councilors, so that it can fulfill its mission as a center of good judgment. We will struggle to gain the seats necessary to attain this goal.”

From the above, it is evident that the tone of the Sōka Gakkai political position is progressive and designed to appeal to the same group to which the Socialist Party appeals. At the same time, the Sōka Gakkai makes clear that it adopts this stand from its own original position.

Writing in a symposium in the July, 1963, issue of *Bungei Shunju*, Prof. Miyagi Otoya of the Tokyo University of Engineering advances the opinion that, while the social ideology of the Sōka Gakkai is leftist and progressive, the actual mood of the Sōka Gakkai is right wing and conservative. Thus, while the slogans of the Sōka Gakkai are progressive and appeal to those who desire social change, the actual practice of Sōka Gakkai officials tends toward conservatism and working within the present social structure. The Sōka Gakkai support of Azuma, the conservative candidate, in the Tokyo gubernatorial election would tend to lend weight to this thesis, as would the general support of the ruling party policies in local government assemblies.

The clean-up of politics was the big item in all of the Sōka Gakkai literature prepared for this election. President Ikeda emphasized that present local government in its ugly self-interest, double-dealing conventionality and favoritism is making fools of the people. “The present assemblymen fight for special privilege, fatten themselves and buy votes to stay in office .... The men recommended by the Kōmei Seiji Remmei will work

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honestly for all the people and bring in a new, bright society." An editorial in the *Kōmei Shimbun*, organ of the Kōmei Seiji Remmei, points out the disparity between the beautiful new government buildings that one finds in any city and the poor roads, inadequate sewer systems, crowded schools in buildings which were thrown up hurriedly after the war, and the lack of adequate housing. The editorial states that, according to the present Constitution, government is to serve the people and therefore politicians must sacrifice their own comfort and privilege to work for the improvement of the living standards and comfort of all the people. The editorial closes on this note: "This may be a way of thorns, but like the young men who overthrew the Tokugawa Bakufu, burning with the frontier spirit of the pioneers who brought overflowing prosperity to America, like the leaders of the emerging nations who have thrown off the shackles of colonialism, realizing that the glorious road to peace and prosperity can only be opened by us of the Kōmei Seiji Remmei, we go forward in strength, as it is expressed in our song, 'the good society which we have seen in our dreams,' let us open the fight for constructive politics."

### Results of the Elections

#### First Round

The local elections of 1963 were held in two rounds, the first for prefectural assemblymen for the five large cities, prefectural governors, and mayors of the large cities was held on April 17. The second round for ward councilmen in Tokyo and city and town and village councils throughout Japan was held on April 30. In prefectural assemblies the Sōka Gakkai

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elected 56 men, as contrasted with four men elected in 1959. Only the candidate in Ibaraki Prefecture was defeated. He ran fifth in a field of eight men running for four seats. Sōka Gakkai candidates received a total of 1,028,945 votes, 2.6% of the vote cast. This, however, gives no indication of the relative strength of the Sōka Gakkai in the population at large since the majority of the electoral districts had no Sōka Gakkai candidate for whom votes could be cast. The main center of strength is still the Tokyo area. The Sōka Gakkai now holds 17 seats in the 120-seat Tokyo Prefectural Assembly and five seats in the Kanagawa Assembly. The total for the Kanto area is twenty-six.

Sōka Gakkai strength in prefectural assemblies by general areas of Japan is as follows: (Figures in parenthesis are the total number of assembly seats in the area.)

Kyūshū	8 (399)	Sōka Gakkai has 3 seats in Fukuoka and two in Nagasaki. No seats in Saga and Oita.
Chūgoku	3 (254)	No seats in Yamaguchi, Shimane and Tottori.
Shikoku	4 (182)	
Kinki	9 (429)	Sōka Gakkai has five seats in Osaka. No seats in Shiga, Mie and Nara.
Chūbu	4 (503)	No seats in Niigata, Nagano, Aichi, Toyama, Ishikawa and Fukui.
Kantō	26 (497)	Sōka Gakkai has 17 seats in Tokyo, five in Kanagawa. The candidate in Ibaraki was defeated.
Tōhoku	1 (321)	No seats in Aomori, Iwate, Yamagata and Fukushima.
Hokkaidō	1 (103)	

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The general election policy of the Sōka Gakkai would seem to be quite conservative. No candidate is nominated unless he is almost certain to be elected. Thus the Sōka Gakkai nominated single candidates for the Tokyo Prefectural Assembly in Shinagawa, Setagaya, Kōtō, Sumida, Edogawa, Adachi and Kita wards in Tokyo, and these men all led the field in their electoral districts. In Ota Ward, the only ward in which the Gakkai nominated two candidates, they ranked third and fourth. For the total country, 21 Sōka Gakkai candidates led their electoral districts, 10 placed second, 11 were third and six were fourth.

In elections to the assemblies of the five large cities, the Sōka Gakkai elected nine men in Yokohama, eight in Ōsaka, six in Kōbe, seven in Kyōto and eight in Nagoya.

### Second Round

In the second round elections to city, town and ward assemblies, the Sōka Gakkai also made significant gains.

(Tokyo Wards)

In elections to Tokyo's ward councils, the Sōka Gakkai elected all of its 136 candidates, as contrasted with the 75 elected in 1959. The Gakkai areas of strength are shown in the following table. (The figure in parenthesis is the total membership of the assembly.)

Ōta	10 (60)	Toshima	7 (48)
Adachi	8 (52)	Kita	8 (52)
Katsushika	7 (48)	Itabashi	8 (52)
Kōtō	8 (48)	Shinagawa	8 (48)
Arakawa	7 (44)		

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(City and Town Councils)

Throughout the country, the Kōmei Seiji Remmei nominated 604 candidates to city councils (exclusive of the five large cities) and elected 587. In elections to town councils 157 candidates were nominated and 154 elected.

By area, Sōka Gakkai strength in city and town councils is as shown in the following table. (Figures in parenthesis are defeated Sōka Gakkai candidates.)

Area	City	Town	Total
Kyūshū	82 (2)	48	130
Chūgoku	54 (1)	6	60
Shikoku	33 (4) <sup>1</sup>	6 (1)	39
Kinki	75	23	98
Chūbu	84 (1)	19	103
Kantō	151 (2)	26 (2)	177 <sup>2</sup>
Tōhoku	71 (7)	4	75
Hokkaidō	35	21	56

<sup>1</sup> Sōka Gakkai's biggest failure in this election was in Takamatsu where 44 seats were at stake. The Kōmei Seiji Remmei nominated four candidates of whom three were defeated. The four candidates ranked 40, 50, 51, 54.

<sup>2</sup> The 136 Sōka Gakkai Tokyo ward councilmen are not included in this total.

### **Total Results**

In the two waves of elections to local organs of government, the Sōka Gakkai nominated a total of 992 candidates and elected 971, a record of 97.8% success. This again is a testimonial to the conservative election policy of the Sōka Gakkai in preferring to elect few candidates by large margins than to enter more candidates and run the risk of having some failures. Including the members who were holdovers from previous elections, the present strength of the Sōka Gakkai in organs

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of local self-government is :

Prefectural Assemblies	56
City Councils	725
Ward Councils	137
Town and Village Councils	161
TOTAL	<u>1,079</u>

The striking gains of Sōka Gakkai are evident when this figure is contrasted with the figure of 293 who held office in 1959.

### Miyazaki Prefecture

In Miyazaki City the only Sōka Gakkai candidate for the prefectural assembly ran third in a field of ten. He polled 8,780 votes out of a total of 74,286 or 11.8% of the votes cast. In elections to city councils the Kōmei Seiji Remmei nominated 12 candidates of whom ten were running for the first time. In elections to town councils eight candidates were nominated of whom seven were new. All candidates were elected.

In Miyazaki City, the prefectural capital (a trading and government center with no heavy industry), the four Sōka Gakkai candidates polled 7.7% of the total vote. In Nobeoka City, the only industrial city in the prefecture, three candidates polled 7.0% of the vote. In three very rural cities Sōka Gakkai candidates polled 6%, 5%, and 3% of the votes cast.

While the gains of the Sōka Gakkai have obviously been large in the last four years, the Sōka Gakkai is still only a very minor factor in this rural prefecture's political life.

### Evaluation

The Sōka Gakkai obviously made striking gains in the local

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elections of 1963. Over one thousand men in local assemblies throughout the country is a political force which cannot be overlooked. In order to make these gains, the Sōka Gakkai must obviously have grown significantly during the previous four years. However, this election gives no real basis for arriving at an estimate of total Sōka Gakkai membership since in many electoral districts throughout the country there was no Sōka Gakkai candidate for whom votes could be cast.

Again in this election, as in the past, the main strength of the Sōka Gakkai has been shown to lie in the metropolitan areas, particularly in Tokyo Prefecture. In the Tokyo prefectural and ward assemblies the Sōka Gakkai strength is such that it could begin to exert significant pressure for the adoption of some of its social welfare aims provided they can be put into concrete form. The Sōka Gakkai is a factor to be reckoned with in the political life of Tokyo.

This election has also demonstrated once again that Sōka Gakkai strength is not well developed in rural areas, especially in the Tōhoku district.

The so-called new religions (*shinkō shūkyō*) of Japan have largely made their appeal to socially displaced persons on the fringes of Japanese society. In this, the Sōka Gakkai is no exception. Its great strength is in urban areas of great mobility and social change, and it has much less strength in conservative rural areas where the traditional social structure is better preserved. It has perhaps been more successful than any other group in exploiting the fringes of Japanese society, but it has yet to penetrate to the core of that society. This presents the greatest barrier to further Sōka Gakkai expansion, and on

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whether or not it can successfully pass this barrier and penetrate the core of society depends the future of this movement. (There is also the possibility that the traditional Japanese society will disintegrate swiftly enough that the Sōka Gakkai will not find it necessary to penetrate it.)

Some commentators feel that the Sōka Gakkai has already reached the limits of its possible expansion in its present direction and that the current emphasis on political activity represents a change in direction in order to stimulate further growth. This was the point of view of the participants in the *Bungei Shunjū* symposium. However, as has been stated above, this is an oversimplification which ignores the relation of politics to religion in the Nichiren tradition. Moreover, it ignores the fact that the Sōka Gakkai has been engaged in political activity since 1954, over the period of its greatest and most rapid growth. On the other hand, it must also be said that there are indications that the growth rate is slowing and that political activity is being exploited to make new gains. While the growth figures published in Sōka Gakkai publications, as well as the gains made in the 1963 elections, indicate that the Sōka Gakkai is still growing rapidly, recent issues of these publications indicate a great concern with the present rate of growth. Speeches by President Ikeda and various directors of the Sōka Gakkai call for a return to the drive and vigor of the early days of the movement. There is a call for a return to the spirit with which the rapid growth began under the late President Toda. Thus it would seem that, at least in the minds of its leaders, the Sōka Gakkai rate of growth is beginning to slow down. Also in recent issues of its publications the Sōka

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Gakkai has been exploiting to the fullest the activities of its members in the national Diet and in local assemblies, attempting to show that in these legislative bodies these men, and only these men, are really working for the welfare of the whole population. These men will no doubt play a major role in the Sōka Gakkai effort to break through into the heart of Japanese society.

## GLOSSARY OF JAPANESE NAMES AND TERMS

Bungei Shunju 文芸春秋	Miyagi, Otoyō 宮城音弥
Daibyaku Renge 大白蓮華	Myōhō-rengē-kyō 妙法蓮華經
Hoke Kyō (Saddharma-Puṇḍarīka) 法華經	Nichiren 日蓮
Honzon 本尊	Nichiren Shō-shū 日蓮正宗
Ikeda, Daisaku 池田大作	Ōbutsu Myōgō 王仏冥合
Kōmeikai 公明会	Risshō Ankoku Ron 立正安国論
Kōmei Seiji Remmei 公明政治連盟	Sandai Hihō Bonjōji 三大秘法稟承事
Kōseiren 公政連	Shinkō Shūkyō 新興宗教
Kōmei Shimbun 公明新聞	Sōka Gakkai 創価学会
Lotus Sutra (see Hoke Kyō)	Toda, Jōsei 戸田城聖

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PLACE NAMES

Geographical areas

Kyūshū	九州
Chūgoku	中国
Shikoku	四国
Kinki	近畿
Chūbu	中部
Kantō	関東
Tōhoku	東北
Hokkaidō	北海道

Prefectures

Aichi	愛知
Akita	秋田
Fukui	福井
Fukuoka	福岡
Fukushima	福島
Ibaraki	茨城
Ishikawa	石川
Iwate	岩手
Kanagawa	神奈川
Mie	三重
Miyazaki	宮崎
Nagasaki	長崎
Nara	奈良
Niigata	新潟
Ōita	大分
Ōsaka	大阪
Saga	佐賀
Shiga	滋賀
Shimane	島根

Tōkyō	東京
Tottori	鳥取
Toyama	富山
Yamaguchi	山口
Yamagata	山形

Cities

Kōbe	神戸
Kyōto	京都
Miyazaki	宮崎
Nagoya	名古屋
Nobeoka	延岡
Ōsaka	大阪
Yokohama	横浜

Tokyo Wards

Adachi	足立
Arakawa	荒川
Edogawa	江戸川
Itabashi	板橋
Katsushika	葛飾
Kita	北
Kōtō	江東
Ōta	大田
Setagaya	世田谷
Shinagawa	品川
Sumida	墨田
Toshima	豊島