

Seno'o Girō and the Dilemma of Modern Buddhism
—Leftist Prophet of the Lotus Sutra—

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INTRODUCTION

The importance of the role of the Lotus Sutra in Japanese Buddhism is generally well appreciated by scholars of religion and history. Since its introduction to Japan by the monk Saichō in the Heian period this sutra has been strongly associated with the welfare of the nation, and its nationalistic character was further emphasized by Nichiren, founder of Nichirenshū. It would be no exaggeration to say that in the modern period the Lotus Sutra is firmly identified in the popular mind with the political right.

But in the midst of that is one fascinating figure, Seno'o Girō (1890-1961), founder of the short-lived Shinkō Bukkyō Seinen Dōmei (Association of New Buddhist Youths, 1931-1936), who stands out as a lone spokesman for the political left.¹

Seno'o's personal pilgrimage spanned tradition and modernity, and took him from the political right to the extreme left such that in the vicissitudes of this one life is somehow recapitulated the whole dilemma of Japanese Buddhism since the Meiji Restoration. It highlights well the unresolved conflicts at the heart of modern liberal Buddhism.

The radicalization of Seno'o came when he renounced Nichirenshū and drifted to the left. Consequently, when mainstream Nichirenshū openly supported the imperialist war,² Seno'o was imprisoned as a Communist sympathizer.

1. For a survey of these moderns, see Tokoro 1976, pp.322-383; for an overview, see Mochizuki 1968.

2. Not all Nichiren groups did, though. The Reiyūkai (from which Risshō Kōseikai evolved) and Sōka Gakkai, for example, are exceptions.

Under pressure, he underwent *tenkō* ("change of mind") and recanted his leftwing politics, cutting short his New Buddhist Youth movement.³ Resuming his personal commitment after the war to world peace and older ties, Seno'o formally joined the Communist party a year before his death, but this last-minute decision may be no indication of the *telos* of his life. It was as circumstantial as his earlier recantation.

His isolation has meant that Seno'o has been little understood and seldom studied. It was an outsider, the writer Inagaki Masami, who first attempted to compile a collection of his essays (Inagaki 1975) and who urged the publication of his diaries, *Seno'o Girō nikki*, in ten volumes. The following study draws almost exclusively on the former. The voluminous diary requires a more detailed psycho-historical study in the future. The following is thus offered only as a preliminary introduction of this figure to the English reader.⁴

The subtitle to this essay reflects an additional theoretical concern. Seno'o's independence of mind represents, I believe, a case of what Robert N. Bellah would call "prophetic individualism." He was a Buddhist who could transcend his social milieu and subject it to a transcendental critique. A modern disciple of Nichiren, he confronted anew the eternal dialectics between the universality of the Dharma and the particularity of culture. Which should serve which and how? An ambiguity not always resolved in the writings of Nichiren himself, this question gave rise to the polarization of the rightist and the leftist reading of him by two camps in two phases of Seno'o's own life. My own interest in Seno'o is due to this concern with the history of (à la Niebuhr's *Christ and culture*) Dharma and culture in Japan. The present essay is also an extension of my contin-

3. Compare this with the opposite fate of Makiguchi Tsunesaburō, whose martyrdom produced a more resilient Sōka Gakkai.

4. Any full study would require access to the journal articles in *Wakōdo* that he edited. I have no access to these at present.

uing interest in a social history of the Lotus Sutra tradition as seen in the Far East.⁵

SENO'O GIRŌ: HIS LIFE AND CAREER

Seno'o's life may be divided into four periods:

- (1) 1920-1927: Beyond Shinran to Nichiren
- (2) 1928-1930: Beyond Nichirenism to Prophetic Critique
- (3) 1931-1936: Disenchantment and Radicalization
- (4) 1937-1961: Imprisonment and the After-War Years

His childhood and youth will not be covered in this study, and the last phase is dealt with in passing only as a post-script.

1920-1927: Beyond Shinran to Nichiren. Seno'o was born into a Shinshū family and had a promising beginning in his student days. It was expected that he too would go on to the then Tokyo "Imperial" University and enter officialdom as indeed many of his classmate peers would. Unfortunately, he came down with a stubborn disease which prematurely cut short his education and that future career. That placed him effectively outside the establishment and would land him eventually in the opposing camp. The illness might

5. There is an additional methodological concern still. Bellah's notion of "prophetic individualism" was generalized from Weber's sociology of religion. Although Weber saw more narrowly only the "mystical" (the "exemplary prophet") element in Buddhism, Bellah has recognized the potential of a Buddhist critique of the world-order based on what Ienaga Saburō styled as the "logic of negation" (*hitei no ronri*). However, Nichiren has not been too warmly received in this regard; this "hot-blooded" warrior-saint has never fared too well among even Japanese liberal thinkers. However, by a semantic coincidence, there is realized in Nichiren a *vyākaraṇa* ("prophesy" in one translation) which contributed to his "prophetic" proclamations. That implication was recognized if only implicitly by Anesaki Masaharu in his very early English study (Anesaki 1920), which he penned without knowing Weber's categories. Nor did Weber know Anesaki. In a related study, I would contrast Buddhist *vyākaraṇa* and the Hebraic concept of the *nabī* and both in relation to Weber's idea of the "emissary prophet."

also have pushed him back in time to matters of faith that the progressive men of the Meiji Enlightenment had chosen to forget. In 1933 this outsider would recall the chain of events that led him back to faith and forward to denouncing the establishment:

I was born into a Shinshū family and brought up in pious *nenbutsu* surroundings. At twenty-one, though, a grave illness struck and I was forced to leave school. From then till I was thirty, I was literally at the brink of death. Perhaps it is fate that I should be brought back to life by the different outlook of Nichiren. That philosophy has since been for me the sole Truth. For twenty and more years I devoted myself to studying and spreading it, so diligently as to forget sleep itself. Though physically still weak, I would push forward to fulfilling the Buddhist calling. However, the result was that I came to question the whole religious establishment itself. I found myself with no other alternative but to oppose it (Inagaki 1975, p.326).

From the despair brought about by physical ailment, the young Seno'o would discover his own liberation in Nichiren; in time, he would take on the whole Buddhist establishment. But how? Why, to begin with, would Nichiren's "very different" gospel cure this sickly young pious Shinshū man? At least one answer can be provided by an understanding of an aspect of cultural psychology.

Cultures, it seems, are molded by what Karl Jaspers calls "paradigmatic personalities." They have defined and resolved historical cultural identity crises in their respective societies. In Japanese history, only a handful of individuals—such outstanding *jinbutsu* (figures) as Shōtoku Tai-shi—can be said to have molded the future Japanese character. In Shōtoku's case, however, it is not clear where historical personality ends and cultural or folk heritage begins.⁶ For greater realism we should turn to a later but

6. Shōtoku survived as an ego-ideal through a lot of hagiographical lore.

no less "axial age," and to the character of the Kamakura reformers, especially the polar types of Shinran and Nichiren.

The faiths and personality profiles of these two could not be farther apart—a fact recognized readily by Nichiren in his bitter polemics against Shinran's master, Hōnen. In Shinran there is the more "Luther-esque" virtue of total submission to the miraculous effect of the Other Power. It is not that Shinran himself was always that passively recipient, but most of his positive values he placed in externals, such as Amida, the Buddha-essence (in so far as Buddha-nature is other than the normal sinful self), or the naturalness of Dharma (*jinen hōni*). Consequently the Shinran-esque character (in its extreme form, of course, this should not be confused with Shinran himself) is typically introverted and obsessively self-incriminative, too ready to find its own shortcomings and unworthiness. (Though unlike their Protestant counterparts, Shinshū pietists usually do not so judge others by the same standards as themselves; they accept common human frailties in moderate form.) It is through reliance on grace that moral individuation comes about.

Nichiren and the Nichiren-esque character are very unlike this type. Though no less aware of the burden of sin and karma weighing on the self (or, better, that "lesser self" prior to assuming the power of the *Lotus Dharma*), Nichiren and his followers would assume a more "Calvin-like" stand to the world. To this character-type is associated more strength of will and worldly activism, verging upon the almost aggressively self-righteous. From that more overt, bodhisattvic calling, there is often expressed a distaste against men of weak will and mere self-pity. There is more the conviction that one can and should change the self and mold the world in accordance with one's will, especially in defense of the Truth.

For example, the "child Shōtoku" is not based on history but probably has to do with the Japanese *amae* cultural psychology.

In the Meiji period, after centuries of rather arid sectarian scholasticism (*shūgaku*) and ritualization of faith, there was a rediscovery of the Kamakura reformers as living personalities. Among these, once more Shinran and Nichiren come across as the better, if variously, drawn models. Like any "Life of Jesus," it is inevitable that the moderns rewrote the lives of Shinran and of Nichiren somewhat according to their own modern tastes. Still they kept within certain parameters.

A revealing note is struck in Anesaki's second preface to his major study, *Hokkekyō no gyōja: Nichiren*. There he criticized two prevalent portrayals of Nichiren that he found too one-sided. One is the near divinization of Nichiren into some kind of superman, and the other the abject humanization of Nichiren into a "sickly weakling" like another Shinran.⁷ We can understand the conversion of Seno'o from Shinran to Nichiren within that modern image of this pair.

Seno'o apparently suffered weaknesses, not just of body but also of soul—that is, he probably adopted a Shinranesque acceptance of his own frailty and reliance on the grace of the Other Power. In nenbutsu one does not arouse oneself to change one's destiny. Nichiren came as a shot in the arm for here the call is to self-conquest in defiance of all adversities, to awake the will to do battle with illness. This apparently revived Seno'o and ended any self-pity he might have had. To fulfill a vow, he seems to have intentionally taken on a trying pilgrimage to all the sacred sites. Taking his destiny into his own hands seems to sustain him then and beyond. "Perhaps it is fate..." he said. Perhaps it is more than just that.

For the next twenty years Seno'o faithfully studied this tradition. The beginning of his training seems traditional enough. First he took the bodhisattvic precepts under a Nichiren monk, Nikken, and was given the Buddhist name

7. Anesaki, as Seno'o himself discovered later, would opt for a more realistic picture of Nichiren as a man felt called.

Gakuo. That was in 1915. After that came the pilgrimage, a practice one would expect more from a Tokugawa pietist than from a new Meiji man. Nichiren was then being rediscovered by some moderns, beginning with the young romantic Takayama Chogyū, who saw Nietzschean individualism and will in this medieval figure. Suddenly Nichiren appeared a contemporary. Though Chogyū's *Nichiren* is more romantic than nationalistic, it paved the way for the rightist reading, championed by the *Nichirenshugi* ("Nichiren-ism") of Tanaka Chigaku and Honda Nisshō, dedicated to uniting the various temple-lineages or sub-sects of Nichirenshū under its own philosophy.

Seno'o visited Tanaka Chigaku at his Kokuchūkai (Pillar of Japan Society) headquarters in 1918. He did not impress the more aristocratic Tanaka as he did the co-founder, Honda Nisshō. Honda appealed more to commoners within the movement. Seno'o headed his own chartered group in November of 1918. He was put in charge of the Dainippon Nichirenshugi Seinen Dōmei (The Youth Association of the Great Japanese Nichirenism Movement) and was made the editor of its magazine, *Wakōdo* ("Wakabito": "Youth"), which was meant to disseminate Nichirenism. It also gave Seno'o a vehicle of expression in which he excelled.

His first piece, "Wakōdo no yobi" (The call of the young), in the first issue, was initially given as a talk. One line might be autobiographical:

[The goal of the young] is not directed at some lifeless image of a Utopia—not the pious nenbutsu for the purpose of attaining salvation on some other shore (Inagaki 1975, p.9).

Not Amida's Pure Land but this *saha* world is the true concern of the Lotus Sutra and its followers.⁸ Seno'o was equally critical of the secular gospels:

8. Of course, modern scholars can tell us that, unlike Hōnen his master, Shinran did not himself consider the other shore as something beyond; but in common practice and relative to Nichiren activism, even Jōdo Shinshū would be judged too privatized a religion of the heart.

Recently there have been those who speak for communism, socialism and [other forms of] extremism. But Marx's dialectical materialism, which informs the flow of Western history and civilization, can never really tame the lives of men that recognize within themselves the spiritual spark (Inagaki 1975, p.11b).

Man does not live by bread alone, Seno'o said, so satisfying material needs would not suffice. In the same essay, Seno'o pushed aside social Darwinism and its notion of progress through conflict. Nichirenshugi was for peace and harmony, not the gross "survival for the fittest." Man is no animal, for he can shed tears at seeing another suffering. The rebellious culture of the West can never bring true peace to the world (Inagaki 1975 p.12).⁹

Seno'o then called on the young to be model citizens, spiritually transforming the world through chanting the title of the Lotus Sutra, fellow-bodhisattvas of Nichiren that "rose out of the earth" in defence of the Dharma.¹⁰ He repeated the call Nichiren once made in his time:

[In this divine land of Japan] will be felt the power that is One and Nondual: The doctrine, bright as the sun itself, that sees the Dharma and the Nation as one, the ruler and the Buddha united, [as] the world itself becomes Japan (Inagaki 1975, p.14b).

Nichiren made that kind of statement in an age of faith, in a world defined by the sacred Mt. Sumeru cosmography. It

9. In another article (1923) he contrasted the analytical West and the synthetic East. Similar to Inoue Enryō, who initiated such grand comparisons, Seno'o looked to the Tendai mystery of the "Three thousand worlds in perfect interpenetration" (cosmic holism) for his model of international harmony. Inagaki 1975, p.24 b.

10. Inagaki 1975, pp.13b-14a. The reference is to the host of Mahayana bodhisattvas that the Buddha predicted would rise "in the East" (primary direction in Indian cosmography; Nichiren took this to mean Japan) in the last days (*mappō*) to uphold the Dharma under a leader *Visitacarita* (superior conduct: Japanese *jōgyō*) in whom Nichiren saw himself.

was the utterance of one who hoped to see Japan become the *axis mundi* of spirituality. Adopted now into a secular twentieth century, the same lines might carry very different socio-political implications.

The question is now how the Dharma may serve Japan in a family of nations, or whether Japan should be the instrument to or servant of the Lotus Gospel. Seno'o rejected the latter universalism and sided with the pragmatic particularism of Honda. Nichiren is the pillar of the State (*kokuchū*). People who cannot take pride in their own nation are handicapped in mind and morality. They miss the higher understanding of what constitutes [corporate] humanity (Inagaki 1975, p.13a). Seno'o crafted his argument well:

This is not to say [that we] deny the selfsameness of all things and the single taste [uniformity] of all phenomena. This is not to deny that all men in the Four Seas are brothers, or that one should not love one's enemy. But flowers are red and willows are green. [Each thing has its own particularity.] If one does not understand such natural distinctions that are just as hard and fast, or if one cannot recognize the degree of familiarity in fellowship based on kind, there would never be a [world] culture of true peace and order (Inagaki 1975, p.13a).

We should know not what is said here but what might be implied.

The call to patriotism (*aikoku*) was then common to liberals as well as conservatives. It was a natural response at a time when Japan was still a fledgling on the world scene. The emphasis on the particular has also been characteristic of Tendai thought even during the very insular Heian period. The sentiments do not deviate from tradition.

Nonetheless, Seno'o was here following Honda, his teacher and sponsor. Honda's reading of Nichiren's *Risshō ankoku ron* (Establishing the right and pacifying the nation)

was unique; it is that the security of the nation's well-being should precede the establishment of the true.¹¹ The pragmatics of national security have precedence over all else.

It is in light of that that one should read Seno'o's call. Recalling Nichiren's lamentation that "Nothing in life of importance is as important [*taisetsu* or 'as painful'] as the loss of one's country," he shouted tearfully, it is said: "For the sake of this ancestral land! For the motherland...to action! In all sincerity, to action!...For the sake of the Dharma, for the sake of this ancestral land, advance! Across the first, the second, the third battle front... onward!"¹² Following Honda, he gave this justification:

The country prospers by reliance upon the Dharma. The Dharma is treasured because of man. If the country is destroyed, and its people perish with it, who is there to honor the Buddha? Who would then take refuge in the Dharma? Therefore pray first for the welfare of the nation and [then] for the establishing of the Dharma (Inagaki 1975, p.15).

Later we will see how Seno'o reversed himself and gave perhaps a more proper citation and interpretation of Nichiren on the same issues.

As the editor of *Wakōdo*, Seno'o was at first only a mouthpiece to a cause he had joined. In that capacity he inducted his young readers into the new Nichiren revival. He offered them a summary of Nichirenism (*Nichirenshugi daikan*; Inagaki 1975, pp.60-81). More revealing of his function is a similarly titled piece, however, a 1924 essay called *Hiei naru Nichirenshugi* ("Nichirenism made easy"; Inagaki 1975, pp.31-49). In three installments and set in the format of a conversation between a spokesman for Nichirenshugi, a student and a businessman, it really served to

11. On this, see Tokoro 1965, p.133 and following.

12. Inagaki 1975, p.15 and p.20. This speech was apparently delivered very emotionally ("with tears").

induct young students and future workers into the business world awaiting them. There is of course the usual standard Tendai holistic metaphysics again.¹³

The old harmonism paints a rosy picture; there is no basis to consider any real conflict.¹⁴ The problem of disharmony is easily swept away by a juggling of dialectical negations.¹⁵ The spokesman for Nichirenshugi tapped that harmonism to support paternalistic capitalism. There will be loyal worker-students under kindly businessmen management. In the somewhat optimistic conclusion on "Career and ideal," he depicted the employer sharing some of his wealth voluntarily, in compassion for his workers and for the good of society. Henry Ford was held up as the model, being enamored as the diligent auto mechanic himself freely investing his well-earned money into the business in order to build a better car for all concerned (Inagaki 1975, p.48b). It is a picture that Seno'o would find later mocked by reality.

The early Seno'o thus accepted the status quo and hoped only for limited benevolence and reform from above. Although we read in the same essay how his heart clearly went out to the hard-pressed, toiling coal-miners he reported seeing in Korea, at this stage he could only intellectualize away such suffering as the nature of reality. *Samsāra* (rebirth) is what he called with some resignation the *shinobi no kuni*, the land wherein one bears up to unavoidable pain. The antidote is Faith (*anjin*: a mind pacified). It is the power that one draws upon from within one's own

13. This has been the backbone of Nichiren philosophy since the *shūgaku* (sectarian learning) days of the Tokugawa period. Modern Nichirenshugi still falls back on it for a vision of the ideal world.

14. It is in Weberian terms more this-worldly mystical than this-worldly ascetic. It effects more tension-reducing than personal predicament demanding rational control.

15. For example, in the section dealing with human nature, instead of setting up a minimal disjunction between the real evil and the ideal good, Seno'o pondered in typical Tendai-Madhyamika style over whether human nature is good or evil—and then proceeded to absolve the unreal duality through a "neither and both" and "more" dialectic; see pp.37-43. Compare his more realistic approach to social evil and his attempt to make amends later.

inner resources so as to find joy in the midst of suffering. "Green hills," he recast a poetic Chinese phrase, "are wherever man [i.e., wherever one's heart] is." The religious initiate would see, by way of the same Tendai notion of the coincidence of opposites, how this *sahā* world is somehow instantaneously also the sublime Pure Land of Quiescence and Light.¹⁶ Such cruel comfort to the suffering miners a Marxist would recognize as the opiate of philosophic Idealism. In the present case, it happens to be the yogic indifference Nichiren realized in his darkest hours:

In suffering awake to [the nature of] suffering; in joy rejoice. Realizing both suffering and joy as they truly are (*tathatā*), chant truthfully the Lotus' 'namu myōhō rengekyō' (Inagaki 1975, p.48b).

Seno'o's reading of the tradition was not incorrect. For centuries Mahayana idealism has sought to resolve any seeming unpleasantness between the Ideal and the Real by way of the Two Truths theory. There is *paramārtha*, the highest truth of universal oneness and harmony, and there is *samvrti-satya*, the mundane truth of particular sufferings and pain. Both are real; both are empty; and both somehow are nondual. Seno'o restored them to the same logic—what later he would fault as the fallacy of "conceptualism." In what seems to be a novel if apologetic reading of *hongaku* ("original enlightenment") and *shigaku* ("incipient enlightenment")—a basic dictum taken from the *Awakening of faith in Mahayana*—Seno'o justified the suchness of mundane existence, the *de facto* social reality thus:

From this point of view, religion is on the one hand that which delivers man from pain and sorrow and on the other hand permits the contemplation of that which gives [us true] joy. This is the doctrine of *hongaku*

16. This is the highest of the Four Pure Lands in Tendai classification; it is not to be confused with Shinshū's pietistic Amida's Pure Land—the lowest of the four in Tendai schematics.

[which refers to the higher mode] of intuiting the Real Nature (*jissō*) of all things most thoroughly [i.e. in their holistic perfect interpenetration] and of *shūgaku* [which refers to the weaker] teaching aimed at alleviating suffering and providing [the antidote of] joy (Inagaki 1975, p. 33 f).

In other words, real suffering is handled under the more Hinayanist incipency of enlightenment which would point ahead to the higher, more Mahayanist recognition of innate harmony. Then Buddhahood of self and all would blend into the one mind in the here and now. Translated into practical terms, this means that the Korean miners should bear their particular suffering in noble silence while others more fortunate might speculate on universal harmony. All the vision of higher egalitarianism (*byōdō*: selfsameness) in the *paramārtha* of the One Mind could not or rather would not reach out to change the inequities of the *samvrti* givens. The philosopher has indeed well understood what reality (*dharmatā*) is. He has just not sought to change it for the better.

In that same year Seno'o showed signs of uneasiness with this stand. Having known physical suffering himself, he demonstrated a capacity not only to empathize with others' suffering but also in suffering to reflect on its causes. Compared with the generally rather proud, uncritical and extroverted Nichirenshugi ideologues, he added now his own introverted "self-examination" (*hansei*). This may or may not have a Shinran-esque touch to it.¹⁷

The American Congress had just passed a law discrim-

17. Like his use of *anjin* earlier—a term more natural to Renno's (Shinshū) philosophy—his present call to *hansei* (turn inward and query) might have been drawn from his own prior Shinshū background. It is not that this element is absent in Nichiren himself. Nichiren did see in his own suffering a just desert he inferred of his own evil past, but Nichiren would at the same time be assured of his mission. Henceforth, he would demand others (or the nation) to "mend their ways."

inating against Japanese immigrants to the United States. In reaction to the news, native tempers ran high. There was widespread protest and indignation as well as talks of retaliation, from rallies aimed at boycotting American films, through harassing missionaries to intimation of taking stronger actions. In a very different tone, in *Nichibei mondai to Nichirenshugi* ("Japan-American problems and Nichirenism"; Inagaki 1975 pp.50-59), Seno'o preached calm resolve. He cautioned against any military action seeking only personal gain. He looked to Gandhi and appealed to a higher righteousness and justice as the means of settling disputes and inspiring international cooperation. Recalling Nichiren's uncommon reaction to the Mongolian invasion, he regarded the present injustice as an occasion to reflect on Japan's own unjust discrimination against the Koreans, her unkind remarks against the Chinese and her abuse of *bura-kumin* ("outcasts"; Inagaki 1975, p.56b). In demanding his readers to undergo hansei, Seno'o demonstrated that prophetic self-criticism he saw in his model, Nichiren:

The Great Sage Nichiren prophesied the Mongolian invasion and put his own life on the line by petitioning the Hōjō rulers. The threat of a barbaric invasion was the cause for him to reflect upon whether his own people had not turned away from truth and followed evil instead. [Only then] would he look forward to a revitalization of the spirit of the nation and to its living up to a higher end (Inagaki 1975, p.58a).

Similar to the prophet Isaiah's reaction to the pending destruction of the Temple, Nichiren—as Seno'o now chose to underline—perceived the Mongolian threat as chastisement of an unfaithful nation. Thrice Nichiren petitioned the Hōjō rulers, retiring only after he was unheeded—following Confucian dictum that imperial councils should withdraw in deference at that point. Now in 1924, in response to a crisis facing Japanese nationals in the United States, Seno'o called also first for a self-examination and then only upon that for a renewed faith in the Lotus Sutra and

in Nichiren's leadership:

The people of the small Mongolian nation [sic] are being sent to the great Japanese empire.... [And] Nichiren is the foremost of the bodhisattvas of the Lotus Sutra to carry out his [superior] deeds, the great general that can turn back the Mongols (Inagaki 1975, p.58b, emphasis added).

For someone who had earlier placed the security of the nation above even the righteousness of the Dharma, this is a significant turnaround. Instead of drawing on Nichiren's more "proto-nationalistic" remarks,¹⁸ Seno'o recalled his prior commitment to the universal Dharma. Given this, it is only inevitable then that Seno'o would one day part company with his teacher and patron, Honda. For Seno'o, *risshō* (i.e., Dharma) would ultimately have to have precedence over *ankoku* (i.e., State). The nation is the servant of truth, not vice versa.

Two years later (1926), in an essay addressing specifically that topic "Risshō ankoku no gendaiteki igi" ("The modern meaning in establishing the right and pacifying the state"; Inagaki 1975, pp.82-85), Seno'o, while still proud of Japan's Lotus mission, warned of inordinate pride. Similar presumptuousness had brought only disaster to others. The reference is to the Israelites but the real target was his own countrymen:

It would appear that in looking over the history of the world, the following impression is not incorrect. Namely that there is a big division, like day and night, between those who take the proper moderate pride in their nation [*kuni jiman*, "national self-satisfaction"] and those who do not. A good example of dogmatic pride is the Jewish perception of themselves as the people of

18. Those cited earlier were made in acceptance of an unfaithful nation brought to its knees by divine chastisement. Only so, in regret, did Nichiren mourn the "painful loss of a nation" and of a people entrusted to uphold the Dharma.

God. The cause for their downfall and their misfortune of being so despised lies right there. And that we should not forget (Inagaki 1975, p.82b).

A humanist totally indifferent to questions of race (Korean, Chinese), Seno'o was no anti-Semite. He was only repeating a then commonly held opinion taught even by Christian missionaries. At a time of growing nationalism in Japan, which took the form of a fervent belief that Japan was indeed descended from the gods, Seno'o's internationalism was pushing him toward a showdown with his sponsors.

One senses that Seno'o could no longer overlook the disjunctions between pneumatic harmony and social injustices, between the duty to Dharma and pride in nationhood. This is a discrepancy he probably saw first in himself. Inwardly he recognized that he himself was sin-ridden, and externally he saw much that was ugly (Inagaki 1975, p.82a). Compare this confessional sense of sin with his prior intellectualization of human nature as being Both/Neither Good/Evil and we see the much more personal side of this thinker. It is not that he renounced Tendai harmonism. Far from it. He still would say:

On the one hand, even as my self is full of sin, to strive for uncovering that potential for Buddhahood or the perfection of my humanity; and likewise, on the other hand, to discover the possibility of bringing the nation itself in accord with Truth. Then as a follower of Nichiren [to spread the peace to the world] (Inagaki 1975, p.82a).

Henceforth ideal harmonism and equality is to be realized through rational, deliberate transformation of the given reality. Guiding both, however, is the prerequisite of moral introspection, the hansei of self or reality against the Absolute. Repeatedly he would return to this life of self-examination:

Religion is the highest truth [*paramārtha*] of the spiritual life. The spiritual life is the life of perpetual

self-remonstration [hansei] in direct confrontation with the Absolute. The same it is with the state. By way of reflecting upon the rights and wrongs of one's nation, the real nature of the right and righteous state might then slowly evolve (Inagaki 1975, p.84a).

In the next period, that rectification of the state would take even more concrete form.

1928-1930: Beyond Nichirenism to Prophetic Critique. The Taishō era is associated with democracy and Seno'o was caught up no less in some of its liberal currents. Though versed in traditional *shūgaku* scholastics he was also being influenced by modern *shūkyōgaku* scholarship. In that combined expertise, he had ably defended his teacher Honda on a rather technical point as to what constitutes the *honzon* (the central object of worship) in the Nichiren tradition. In a lengthy piece, *Honzonron hihan* ("A critique of the honzon thesis"), he sided with Honda's revisionist theory that the object is the Buddha Sākyamuni and not the Saddharma of the Pundarika (Lotus Dharma) as traditionally thought (Inagaki 1975, pp.197-220). We will return shortly to this and its impact on Seno'o own thinking.

In 1923 Seno'o had been witness to the great Tokyo (Kantō) earthquake. The natural disaster and the human tragedies touched him greatly. He also saw inhumanity, how some Koreans were made scapegoats of the misdirected frustration of his countrymen. Four years later, Seno'o recalled the lesson gleaned from that disaster in "Mujō yori shin'ai e" ("From a sense of impermanence to faith's compassion"):

Now in retrospect, the great earthquake has brought into my awareness...the evil of self-interest and the illusory nature of all material possessions. As a mortal I became more alert than ever before to the truth of impermanence and the human aspiration for love (Inagaki 1975, pp.197-220; quote from p.202b).

Impermanence was something the Buddha saw. That it took a human disaster to remind Seno'o of this basic truth may be in part due to the Tendai reversal of that doctrine. There was a certain confidence in Tendai in a higher permanent essence (Buddha-nature) which was considered the Mahayanist antidote to the Hinayanist obsession with the phenomenal and the transient.¹⁹ Nichiren's mandalic telescoping of the Three Times (past, present, future) into the eternity of each moment may also help to obscure the more immediate sense of *mujō*. Friendliness and compassion likewise have been basic Buddhist virtues, but it is only then that Seno'o felt it should be based in selflessness (*anātman*) as an extension of faith. A subtle change of orientation, if not in content, can be seen here. Seno'o's concern now reached actively to the sufferers. The philosopher was no longer just offering formulaic harmonism from a safe distance. Wisdom was to be accompanied by warmer compassion. This change probably was influenced by a trend to return to primitive Buddhism.

This trend was a part of a modern reform of traditional ritual-bound Buddhism. Selflessness was now seen to be embodied in the *muga* (no-self) movement. The basic ten precepts (*sīla*) had also been revived. Both had attracted a number of intellectuals who saw in such strenuous self-denial the foundation for a new man. Converts included future Marxists. Kawakami Hajime, the translator of Karl Marx, was himself a one-time convert to this cult emphasizing highly personal, selfless service to others.

Seno'o's devotion now carried the same stamp. True service can only be inspired by no-self, impermanence and suffering. So in the essay noted above, he cited Tolstoy's sobering thesis "On state socialism and Christian socialism": that changes in social structure cannot change human nature as such. The state may, by force of law, require all

19. Chih-i in China contrasted the Hinayana "three marks of existence," namely that all things are impermanent, without self and of the nature of suffering, with the Mahayana One Real Mark, a higher and holistic permanent reality.

men to work for a common cause, but true dedication to service cannot be so legislated. This dedication must come from the heart, as a mark of a voluntary devotion to mankind. Thus true joy is joy derived from selfless service to others, and religion has a role to play in realizing the welfare of men (Inagaki 1975, p.203).

Christian (or here Buddhist) socialism remained Seno'o's ideal, but at the time it probably went with his more traditional hope that the betterment of workers would come about through voluntary cooperation. He still envisaged workers dedicated to one and all under the paternalistic care of their foremen.²⁰ Perhaps there is some significance in his picking a foreman instead of the business owner as his model. The foreman is an employee working closer to the workers themselves, and Seno'o chose him because of his increasing doubts about whether the bourgeois capitalist was so readily charitable. Despite his reservations about "state socialism," Seno'o soon realized that structural changes were in order.

Two months later (1928) Seno'o penned the essay "Shōwa ishin" ("On the Shōwa restoration"; Inagaki 1975 pp.221-241). His tone had changed, but so had the times. If the Taishō era permitted dreams of democracy, then in the Shōwa era, fascism would grow in strength and tensions would mount between the political left and right. On the surface this essay was a celebration of the imperial initiative. Indeed from the Taika Reform to the Meiji Restoration, as Seno'o recapitulated, the concept of "ishin" has always meant benevolent revolution from above. The ruler would work for the good of the people. Indeed Seno'o would so praise *ōdō*: the Imperial Way is not the selfish will of one man but the embodiment of the spirit of the nation itself. Ruler and subject were so ideally of one mind

20. Without self-interest, worker A would work for workers B and C, and B and C would each work for the good of his own coworkers. A foreman who supervises 500 female workers would somehow keep their interests in mind and generously offer them better wages and health benefits. See Inagaki 1975, pp.216-217.

that compliance to *ōdō* could not and must not be misconstrued as servitude (Inagaki 1975, p.222b):

Ōdō is not the *ōdō* of the Imperial House. It is truly the people's *ōdō*. Nay, the Imperial House is not the Imperial House as such; it is the people's Imperial House. As man protects his brain and follows his conscience, so should the people respect the people's Imperial House and obey the people's *ōdō*. This attitude should be held by all in pride (Inagaki 1975, p.222b).

The Imperial Way is ultimately the way of its people. But it is not idolized or made into an absolute. Something else higher is.

Hansei is demanded of both the nation and its citizens. Seno'o had returned once more to this favorite topic of his. A life based on self-examination is the true way of the loyal citizen who strives to live up to the standard of the state. But then the same moral introspection is a part of the state's standards. The three Shinto standards of rule or imperial insignia are the mirror, the seal and the sword. Shintoists and rightists would make a lot of these ancient, mythic symbols of authority, but to Seno'o, they stood for the triad of hansei, humane-ness and practice. The nation reflects upon its own doings, as a mirror would, and in so doing, always acts humanely in all its dealing. This ethical reading of the "right of the state"—more the state under the judgment of the right—was supported with a sprinkling set of quotations from the *Mahāparinirvāna Sutra* and Nichiren, as well as Emperors Jimmu and Meiji themselves (Inagaki 1975, pp.224-227). The ruler and the people are somehow answerable to the higher norms.

Seno'o set up that ideal structure for a specific purpose, namely, in defense of the right of the workers to organize themselves. Political parties, Seno'o charged, came between the king and his subjects. If this sounds ominous and almost rightist, it is not that Seno'o wanted to do away with constitutional democracy. It is rather that parliament had voted then to outlaw what he regarded as a

"royal" way of the people, the right to organize labor. The parliament, charged Seno'o, was being manipulated by the *zaibatsu*, the giant financial houses, to serve their private interests (Inagaki 1975, p.227b). The "Shōwa Restoration" essay suddenly begins to read like a people's manifesto charging those capitalistic families with maliciously corrupting the political process. Instead of celebrating the dawn of a new age of good will, Seno'o forecast pending doom. If the imperial house did not heed the *ōdō* standards of *hansei*, humane-ness and power, and curb the inhumane powers of such partisan politicians it too would fall. For nothing, as Chih-i in China and Nichiren in Japan had reiterated, is ever permanent and all are liable to change. At the end of the second installment of this editorial we read:

Those who are digging the graves for Japan are not foreign enemies. They are none other than the insatiable, so-called "capitalistic" appetites of our own countrymen.²¹

This is a great reversal of his earlier romance with Henry Ford. The image of the paternalistic businessman contributing to the harmony of society and cosmos for the good of one and all was fading rapidly.

This change in Seno'o also reflects changes in an industrializing Japan. Though never an open advocate of violence as such, Seno'o supported the right of workers to strike. The government did not react kindly. By June of the same year, tensions flared. Communist agitators were being picked up by the police. Seno'o could see little that deserved such arrest. These were sincere, educated, youthful idealists, perfectly healthy in mind and body, wanting only to work for the good of the people. In that characterization, Seno'o probably depicted himself. He took a stand

21. Inagaki 1975, p.241b. Seno'o again took up the cause of the Koreans in this essay. It was to be a life-time commitment for this internationalist.

in "Kyōsantō jiken ni chokumen shite Ninnō Hokokukyō no issetsu o yomu" ("Upon reading a section in the Nation-Protection Sutra of the Virtuous King while confronting the Communist incident"; Inagaki 1975, pp.242-254). The *Ninnō-kyō* (Chinese: *Jen-wang-ching*), probably compiled in China, was one of the standard trio of *hokoku* (nation-protecting) scriptures. It promises divine protection to nations but that is always predicated upon the ruler's personal faithfulness to the Dharma. Seno'o quoted a passage to remind the state that calamities such as unrest were never without cause. Hansei might find the cause within:

O King, the causes and the conditions for the destruction of the nation lie in your own karma....(Inagaki 1975, p.242a).

Before putting these sincere leftist youths on trial, Seno'o urged the state to take a good look at its own contribution to such discontent (Inagaki 1975, p.245b). The plank, it might turn out, could be in one's own eyes.

To show how objective factors led to the leftists' discontent, Seno'o offered a simplified Marxist analysis of the situation. The discontent was due to poverty. Poverty was brought about by the economic exploitation of the workers by the capitalists. The polarization of the rich and the poor was inevitable. (In Marx, this is the concentration of wealth in fewer and fewer hands along with the rise in number of the urban proletariat whose proximity would bring about rising self-consciousness leading to organized protest.) Given that, at a certain point the conflict would openly erupt into revolution. That industrialization had brought about much of the social distress then in Japan would probably be agreed to by many. As a Buddhist, Seno'o aligned the Marxist analysis with insights from a different source:

Turning to the teachings of the Buddha, we find that the Buddha anticipated that too. Whenever the nation is about to collapse, the people are said to suffer plague and poverty. The Buddha, who well understood

human nature, is apparently correct here. From ancient times, it has always been poverty that turned mats into banners and changed bamboo sticks into spears [i.e. it forced the poor to take up arms and revolt]. This fact we should ponder well.

Even if the materialistic and anti-religious Marxist critique and the humanistic historical vision (*jinkaku shikan*) of the Buddhist do not [in principle] agree, and even if they should offer rather different analyses of the [real] causes for poverty, nonetheless they do concur in seeing the [necessary] correlation between popular suffering and the rise and fall therefore of nations (Inagaki 1975, p.256a).

The Marxist blamed the situation on uncontrolled economic exploitation of the many by a few in a system, endorsed by Adam Smith, based on private profit and a free and competitive market. The consequences of this system were that the workers lost their freedom, becoming free only to starve and to slave. The Marxists believed in taking revolutionary action. The Buddhists, however, traced the cause of suffering to cravings. In his way, the Buddha would condemn egoism and uncontrolled greed. But here liberation is gained by disowning notions of the "I" and the "mine" and practicing the "selfless communism" that was the monks' fellowship (Inagaki 1975, p.247). In that the two traditions concur on the ill of egoism and the need to eliminate possessiveness, the socialist and the Buddhist should find common cause in opposing the greed-ruled capitalist. And given the understandable discontent of the working class, the state should not move so violently against these labor organizers.

The Marxist/Buddhist parallel drawn here is not new. Other liberal Buddhists had also witnessed the plight of the workers and embraced socialist reforms, using similar scriptural pretexts. The Buddha's anti-caste stand, his vision of dependent origination and universal compassion had been seen by many then (and now) as harbingers of

liberal democracy and socialist reform. Such Buddhist include among leading scholars then, those in the Shin Bukkyō (New Buddhism) movement of Sakaino Kōyō and others. They would not, however, endorse violence, and less readily accepted the Marxist materialism analysis of the situation. Not that Seno'o accepted materialist either, but he worked with the leftists as the others generally would not.

Sympathy for the suffering workers and hope of a new fraternity led men of conscience similar to Seno'o to Marxism. These sympathizers as a whole, however, were believers in the "moral Marxism" of the kind we now associate with the early Marx. Even Kawakami Hajime himself belonged to this camp at first, a moralist outraged by the plight of the poor and the callousness of the rich. Moral Marxists did not fully accept the radical materialistic critique of all culture as ideological superstructures fated to disappear in time. Seno'o might in indignation note how the wealthy capitalist or landlord could earn over 35 billion yen a year while the poor laborer had to worry about tomorrow's bread (Inagaki 1975, p.248), but he came nowhere near to reducing Nichiren to his poor fisherman's background or reducing Nichiren's philosophy to a projection of his economic status. What moved Seno'o to side with the left was first a sense of injustice and finally frustration with the unyielding conservatism of the holders of power in the temple establishment. At no time did Seno'o convert to the pure materialism of Marx.

The reality of daily bread was enough, however, to turn the once idealistic Seno'o away from his early fascination with the power of the will. In the essay under consideration, Seno'o reiterates his point that man does not live by bread alone—Nichiren's spirit soared no less when he was close to starvation—but now he recognized that religion must insist no less on the basic right to sustenance and a more just distribution of worldly wealth. Citing Nichiren's aphorism "Rice as rice is life," Seno'o updated it matter-of-factly, "*Pan* (bread) as bread is life—and the problem of

bread is as such a bodhisattvic concern" (Inagaki 1975, p.248). Insofar as religion is existential hansei as well as airy harmonism, then, the formulation of concrete social programs to better one's fellow men is a duty. To right wrongs is a part of faith. He defended religion to the Leninists: faith is no "opium of the people" (Inagaki 1975, p.253b). Seno'o explained the religious left as follows:

For us, religion is life itself. Society is our concern. The self is social and politics, economics, education, the military as well as the arts etc., are all subsumed under religion. They are open to critique in light of the spirit of the Buddha that informs our lives.

Thus aspiring to change society, to know oneself, to sincerely confess and to simultaneously repay in gratitude the grace [*on*] received...all these are part of the life of faith. At that level, there is no difference between the movement to better society conducted in faith and the same call to action from those believers in historical materialism, socialist or communist (Inagaki 1975, p.253b).

Seno'o saw this religious concern for the concrete as a natural—I would say, nonetheless uncommon—extension of Nichiren's greater emphasis on *ji* (fact) vis-a-vis Chih-i's more sinitic emphasis on *ri* (Chinese *li*, or "principle").²²

"Moral Marxism" did not accept Marx's atheism and Seno'o would have to write against that uncompromising stand on the left.²³ Such reservations notwithstanding, Seno'o's association with the left alienated his rightist overseers Tanaka and Honda, as well as the moneyed backers who underwrote *Wakōdo's* publication. Although the inevitable did not happen immediately, three years later

22. This Sino-Japanese contrast has been well acknowledged in our times by Ui Hakuju as well as Tamura Yoshirō. Seno'o's *ji*-realism in siding with the leftists here went beyond even any traditional *ji*-speculationism. One can admire "rice" as fact but that is not the same as fighting for the daily bread. See Inagaki 1975, pp.302-315.

23. For example, see "Hanshōkyō undō hihan" (A critique of the anti-religion movement), Inagaki 1975, pp.302-315.

the Dainippon Nichirenshugi Seinen Dōmei was disbanded by its Nichirenshugi founders and publication of the magazine *Wakōdo* was suspended.

1931-1936: Disenchantment and Radicalization. Seno'o reports in *Shinkō bukkyō e no tenshin* ("Metamorphosis to the new Buddhism") in 1931:

From January to March of this year [1931], I expressed my views on what the proper Buddhist attitude toward capitalism should be. I did so first in *Wakōdo* and then in pamphlets, in open opinions for others to consider.

The conclusion I came to is that the priesthood itself is parasitic and only the paid servant of the capitalists. Therefore in the end, any religious reform must change the capitalist system as such. This seems to be the quickest of routes possible (Inagaki 1975, pp.260-311; quote from 264b).

Seno'o's characterization of the temple was a bit harsh. Buddhist priests were not the lackeys of the capitalists, but the temple establishment was indeed an entrenched, conservative and propertied institution that had frustrated the hopes for liberal reforms. There was a growing gap between the conservatives in control and the new liberal scholar (academic) monks. Old rituals on which temples depend for their revenue died hard and new ideas, sound on paper, could not effect changes quickly. That was the fate awaiting the "New Buddhism" group mentioned earlier. Shin Bukkyō members were erudite and were faithful to their sect denominations as such. They were inclined toward social reform but they could little reform their own home institution. Clerical elders in the various Buddhist sects retained their control. Eventually this liberal wing of modern Buddhists and Buddhologists was edged out by the radical left and right, and when they shrank from supporting the Marxists, Seno'o went ahead. When they remained loyal to their sects, Seno'o abandoned his. He found the evil of capitalism both inside and outside the religious

world. He called for an abolition of both sects and capitalism in "Shinkō bukkyō undō no tenshin" (Toward a new Buddhist movement," whose main tenets he described as:

- 1) To negate all established religious sects to date; and to take refuge directly in the historical Buddha himself;
- 2) In accordance with the wisdom and compassion of the Buddha, to deny the capitalist economic system and promote instead a society based on common property and common prosperity (Inagaki 1975, pp.255-259; quote from p.265a).

The first of these tenets marked his total break with Nichirenshugi and all sectarianism. The second marked his identification with the leftist cause.

Nichirenshugi had sought ideological unity among Nichiren sub-sects before, but now Seno'o wanted to found a "New Buddhist Youth" movement that would sponsor both ideological and institutional unity. The call to reunite all Buddhist sects under one roof with the Buddha Sākyamuni as its head had gone out before. It was one of many modern Buddhist dreams, best spelled out by Murakami Senshō in his ambitious *Bukkyō tōitsuron* ("On uniting the Buddhist teachings"). Therein the traditional Tendai classification of the sutras was modified somewhat to yield a new universalistic schema with which all the sects could be accommodated. Murakami admitted eventually that the schema was flawed and the dream of ecumenicalism somewhat too premature. Seno'o knew the Tendai scheme would not do.²⁴ The "Four Periods and Five teachings" classification that neatly concluded itself with the Lotus Sutra represented a spiritual and not a literal or historical truth.²⁵ Following Anesaki Masaharu in believing in a

24. He knew the controversy of *Daijō hibussetsuron* "Mahayana is not the teaching of the historical Buddha" which drew a sharp distinction between "authentic" early Buddhism and "inauthentic" later Mahayana. He referred to it in his essays. See for example, Inagaki 1975, pp.264-268.

25. This is how the *hibussetsuron* was usually resolved, as by Ui Hakuju.

common, fundamental (*konpon*) core running through early and subsequent Buddhism, Hinayana as well as Mahayana (see Anesaki 1978), however, Seno'o sought a new synthesis. He would utilize that thesis, which assumes as an ultimate source of inspiration for all Buddhist schools the historical Buddha Sākyamuni, to rebuild Buddhism itself. So historically minded was he that Seno'o would drop the sectarian Nichirenshū chant of "namu myōhō rengekyō" ("Homage to the Lotus Sutra") and create a new "namu shakamuni ya" ("Homage to Sākyamuni") which would be the chant of the New Buddhist Youth movement.²⁶ In a way, this shift to the Buddha from the Dharma (the Sūtra-Dharma) had been anticipated by his earlier defense of the *honzon* thesis of Honda.

Honda himself had accepted the historian's corrective and thought that properly speaking, since the Lotus Sutra honored the Buddha, the Buddha and not the Dharma should be regarded as the object of worship.²⁷ Standing in the way of the unification of the Sangha were the sects. In order to realize this dream, Seno'o took on the whole establishment. The movement demanded such a radical severing of family temple ties that the New Buddhist Youth never claimed a large following.

Seno'o forged ahead, however, and in "Shinkō bukkyō e no tenshin" (1931) launched a frontal attack on capitalism, armed with tenets of pristine Buddhism. He renounced

26. The "ya" was added to emulate Sanskrit phonetic ending, which goes to show how modern Buddhological scholarship affected his Buddhist consciousness.

27. This is a peculiar conflict between *shōkyōgaku* (Japan's early venture into Religionswissenschaft) and traditional *shōgaku*. See Motai 1968, pp.279-301. Though the exchanges pro and con are extremely complicated, in this case tradition has actually the better case. Buddha-yāna might indeed be behind the Lotus gospel, but when it assumed a sutra status by (doctrinal) necessity, the Dharma proclaimed has precedence. In Buddhism, the *kerygma* to which a Buddhist respond does not lie in a church (the sangha) but in a (newly "heard") sutra. To the extent that one always "follows the Dharma" and not the Buddha, one should bow to the *sūtra-dharma* even in a scripture that glorifies the Buddha (Buddha-yāna).

Nichirenshugi but personally not Nichiren himself. In fact, he praised Nichiren's doctrine for a "timeliness" of all teachings to justify his own departure from tradition (Inagaki 1975, pp.260-262). Seno'o returned to *konpon bukkyō*, to certain basic ideals such as the spirit of religion is a thirst after truth, namely, the (Hinayanist) three marks of existence, the (Mahayanist) emptiness and interdependence, and (their common) compassion, atheism and devotion to the founder. By and large, his was a faith with great trust in reason.

Again he singled out Jōdo (Shinshū especially) as Nichiren had done for letting Amitābha overshadow Sākyamuni. He also criticized the Ittōen movement that called for personal asceticism and preceptual purity. Mere love without social action, he said, is parasitic and an ineffective response to capitalism. He also negated mysticism in general for overlooking actual inequalities. He mocked the degeneration of temple piety into merchandizing service for the dead. His was a battle cry against the mainstream: "Let the dead bury the dead. Let's work toward a future selfless and cooperative society" (Inagaki 1975, pp.262-280; 280-291). In so transcending sectarian loyalties, he even dared to dream of a Buddhist-Christian united front in his enterprise (Inagaki 1975, p.282). And again, his leftist sympathy notwithstanding, Seno'o would not accept a purely materialistic interpretation of reality (Inagaki 1975, pp.313-314; also pp.299-301).

In 1933, Seno'o issued the New Buddhist Youth manifesto, *Shakai henkaku tojō no shinkō bukkyō* ("New Buddhism in the midst of radical social change." The reference to *tojō* ("in the midst of," "en route") represents his understanding of reality as dynamic; society is ever changing and Buddhism, cognizant of change, is the ideal religion to accord with it. Buddhism can transform itself as well as others.

Seno'o retained his liberal Buddhist trust in reason and the pride in progress that goes with it. To begin with, he said, Buddhism agrees with modern rationality and looks

forward to future progress. Seno'o proceeded to prove his case showing where reason stands and how Buddhism would respond. He lists a total of six points; the first two are:

(1) **Secular Reason:** It is atheistic and anti-superstition. It regards the supernatural as a product of ignorance or a projection of naive hopes and fears, a projection of social conflicts. To the Marxist, religion is only an illusion brought about by an opiate.

Buddhism: It, unlike many other religions, is basically atheistic; it is fully rational and humanistic. If God in the West finds it hard to coexist with pure naturalism, then the absence of a Creator in Buddhism is one reason to believe that it can coexist with science (Inagaki 1975, pp. 330-337).

(2) **Secular Reason:** Science denies a spiritual afterlife; otherworldliness is seen as founded on illusion. Seno'o cited current *Religionswissenschaft* theory that declared the body/soul dichotomy a leftover of primitive misconceptions; it ultimately contradicts itself. At one time its function might have been to alleviate the fear of the dying and to ensure in theory ultimate justice. However these are now taken as uncalled for.

Buddhism: Fundamentally Buddhism denies the existence of a soul and speaks of no Beyond. Thus the above charge about religion being otherworldly does not apply (pp. 337-347).

The idea that Buddhism is rational and atheistic and therefore most fitting for the modern world has been voiced before; Inoue Enryō, the first modern Japanese Buddhist, had said much the same. That form of Buddhism was, however, not the one known to the peasants down on the farms, and being so coldly rational it was almost lacking in warmth of human sentiments.

The next two points are:

(3) **Secular Reason:** Being this-worldly, it considers religion impractical and idealistic, having little to say to the everyday world.

Buddhism: The Buddhist sangha has always been of this world. It involved itself in the politics and the economics of the community. That is what should be, and because since both *rūpa* and *citta* (matter and mind) are Buddhist concerns, it is never proper to emphasize only the idealistic. Kiyozawa Manshi, who spoke just of *seishinshugi* ["spiritualism"], ignores the very material basis of the temples.²⁸

(4) **Secular Reason:** The people now desire changes in the capitalistic system. The samurai might need only a constancy of heart; but the people live by the labor of their hands.²⁹ They cannot be robbed of the fruit of their labor.

· **Buddhism:** Compassion is not empty words; its dream of a brotherhood must be realized. Since capitalism exploited the workers and monopolized wealth, the Buddhist would accept the call to abolish private property and resurrect cooperation (Inagaki 1975, pp.360-367).

On this, however, Seno'o was torn between the liberals and the Marxists. He could not endorse the liberals, who supported the right to private property while preaching 'spiritualism,'^u that is, personal sacrifices. He could not endorse totally the Marxists, either, who thought that structural changes alone would guarantee liberty. Seno'o still hoped to liberate man's heart as well so that it would realize the spiritual truth of selflessness, emptiness and interdependence. The final two points are:

(5) **Secular Reason:** Internationalism is the sign of the future; nationalism that inhibits freedom within and sponsors imperialism without is dated. It is against the will of the people and the destiny of the world.

28. Inagaki 1975, pp.347-360. Kiyozawa was of Shinshū and upheld the primacy of the spirit as an answer to the onslaught of materialistic modernity.

29. The reference seems to be to Mencius' distinction between the literati (in Japan, this became the samurai) and the farmers.

Buddhism: The Middle Path looks forward to universal interrelatedness (*pratitya-samutpāda*); Nichiren looked beyond the welfare of Japan and placed a faithless nation under the judgment of the Dharma. In that spirit should one oppose war³⁰ and protest the abuse of the Korean nationals (Inagaki 1975, pp.360-367).

(6) Concluding Proposal: Modern Buddhists have aspired for ecumenical unity and long hoped to find some ideological bases for their common faith.

Since Sākyamuni is the ultimate source of all sects, all Buddhists should now unite under him. The teaching of this new "Bukkyōshugi" (Buddhism-ism)³¹ can be simply stated: It is the selfless or egoless love for all, *muga no ai*. In that spirit, the above program should be realized (Inagaki 1975, pp.374-383).

Seno'o then offered a new exegesis of the meaning of the Three Jewels. The Refuges now represent an exploitation-free society (Sangha), a selfless interdependent outlook (Dharma) and an enlightened, human ideal (Buddha; Inagaki 1975, pp.384-387). Seno'o closed the manifesto with the cry "Carry the Buddha on your shoulder. Down to the streets! Out to the villages, go!"³²

The movement strived to be international, trans-sectarian and anti-separatist, and committed itself to this-worldly activism. It had hardly gotten off the ground when in December of 1936, the government moved quickly to destroy the radical left, and Seno'o was rounded up along with the Communists.

Postscript: Imprisonment and the After-War Years. During his imprisonment, Seno'o underwent *tenkō* and recanted his

30. Communists opposed war on the ground that no worker should kill another worker in a war staged primarily by capitalist-nationalists. Seno'o however also opposed pacifism if pacifism was similarly motivated by considerations of personal benefits.

31. Another interesting indication how Seno'o tapped modern Buddhist scholarship for the tenets of his new faith-movement.

32. The metaphor seems to be borrowed from the "Carry the Cross...."

past. The New Buddhist Youths were disbanded. There was not much resistance. Having lost a leader and true leadership, there was no revival either when Seno'o was released or after the war. Seno'o's recantation was clearly pressured for he soon resumed his old commitments. He continued writing, worked for world peace, and as an extension of long-time Korean sympathy, for the renewal of Japanese and Korean relations. As before, he was sufficiently isolated from the mainstream that his closest political allies were again the leftists. Since he kept writing on matters of religion, we must regard his final membership in the Japanese Communist Party to be primarily a gesture of his long association with them. His heart still lay elsewhere.

Seno'o's movement is noted in anthologies of modern Japanese Buddhism. He will always be remembered as the sole leftist Nichirenite among more notable rightist Nichiren followers. In terms of originality, Shigemoto Tokoro judged that Seno'o contributed a new dynamic reading of the *Muryōgikyō* (Chinese: *Wu-liang-i-ching*).³³ Seno'o took the words in this text "The infinite meanings are born of the One Dharma," to depict a logic for infinite social change (Shigemoto 1976, p.362). Otherwise, Seno'o's contribution to modern Japanese Buddhism is little remembered and less celebrated.

Indeed, throughout his life Seno'o was the outsider. He was converted from Shinshū pietism to Nichiren activism; he took pains to criticize both the former, which was his past, and the latter, the most powerful of Japanese sects. He landed himself into the camp of Tanaka and Honda, only in the end to turn away from Nichirenshugi, from the political right to the political left; understandably he antagonized his former sponsors. He then left sectarian Buddhism altogether to head a new movement, the ecumenical ideals of which in effect repudiated all sects. He finally turned

33. The "Sutra of infinite meanings," one of the Lotus trio of scriptures, probably compiled in China.

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to Marxism, at least on the surface; it was a move that further alienated him. Yet it is hard for me to see him except as a pilgrim for righteousness' sake, a man of conscience who followed wherever Truth and Justice led him.

In the "Manifesto" of his New Buddhist Youth movement he stated this about his convictions:

The New Buddhist Youth movement cannot overlook the social reality of class conflict. However at the same time when it joins hands with the liberation front of the emerging class, even when it understands clearly the social dialectics of change, or when it actively participates in [the shared] struggle, it also seeks to purify the human personality. Thus economic struggle to liberate the emerging class cannot be the sole end. It also must be accompanied by a war to liberate humanity, [for us] to be bodhisattvas seeking to build the Buddha-kingdom on earth (Inagaki 1975, p.386).

The struggle for economic justice was a legitimate one and a Buddhist concern. In many ways, Seno'o's Marxism ends there, not going much further than other "moral Marxists" of an idealistic age. For him, however, material well-being is to be matched simultaneously with a similar change of heart in a more difficult struggle in the moral realm:

The movement must emphasize the preceptual practice that has been lost to the traditional sects. The precepts are a must. They are not just for daily performance and personal growth but also must be part of the larger movement itself. Many blemishes in the communist movement can be traced to a neglect in this area—something not to be overlooked (Inagaki 1975, p.386).

Seno'o sought to realize the almost polar ideal, the Christian socialism that Tolstoy dreamt of, a change not just of society but also of man himself. To that end, he had a trust in the power of religion that the atheistic Marxists never could understand.

There are, admittedly, weaknesses in his program. His was an attempt to turn liberal, modern Buddhist scholarship (*bukkyōgaku*) into a popular Buddhist movement (*bukkyō-shugi*). The "Manifesto," for one, is far too cold; it does not show a religion that many can identify with, and even if they could, the optimism probably could not be sustained for long. Not surprisingly the New Buddhist Youth he appealed to and converted were limited both in influence and in number; the chant "Namu shakamuni ya" that went out is somehow hollow and without the enriching echo of a heart-felt tradition. The line between religious piety and Marxist zeal is fine but it can be better drawn. That it was not probably explains why it could not prevent political sympathy from swaying a person between one and the other, or perhaps back again—as Seno'o's own life might possibly testify to. The failure of his movement is, however, something to be mourned. It spells also the end to any meaningful or large-scale Marxist-Buddhist dialogue in Japan.³⁴ The temple establishment that Seno'o fought and lost to remains, still basically conservative and cautious in a changing world. This vacuum of a legacy is the rightful haunting reminder of the life and career of this lone figure, Seno'o Girō.

34. The example of Poland tells us that profound exchange can happen. Presently the bridge between Buddhism and leftist politics has yet to be built. Yet, there are Buddhist scholars with Marxist leanings, Ienaga Saburō being among the most notable.

Glossary

aikoku 愛國
bukkyō tōitsu ron 仏教統一論
burakumin 部落民
byōdō 平等
 Dainippon Nichirenshugi Seinen
 Dōmei 大日本日蓮主義青年同盟
 Gakuo 學府
hansei 反省
hanshūkyō undō hihyō 反宗教運動批評
hitei no ronri 否定の論理
honkaku 本賞
honzonron hihyō 本尊論批評
jinbutsu 人物
jiri 事理
jissō 真相
jitsugyōka 實業家
 Kokuchūkai 國社會

konpon bukkyō 根本佛教
kuni jiman 國自慢
Myōhōrengekyō 妙法蓮華經
muga 無我
 Nikken 日研
on 恩
Risshō ankoku ron 立正安國論
seishin shugi 精神主義
Shinobi kuni 忍び國
shokaku 始寬
Shōwa ishin 昭和維新
shōkyōgaku 宗教學
shōmon 宗門
taisetsu 大切
tenkō 転向
tenshin 轉身
Wakōdo 若人

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