

1-1-2011

Abe Isoo and Kawakami Hajime in interwar Japan - Economic reform or revolution?

Masako Gavin

Bond University, masako_gavin@bond.edu.au

Follow this and additional works at: http://epublications.bond.edu.au/hss_pubs



Part of the [Asian Studies Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Masako Gavin. (2011) "Abe Isoo and Kawakami Hajime in interwar Japan - Economic reform or revolution?" *East Asia*, 28 (1), 57-74.

http://epublications.bond.edu.au/hss_pubs/483

Abe Isoo and Kawakami Hajime in Interwar Japan — Economic Reform or Revolution?

Masako Gavin, Bond University

Abstract This article explores the views of two eminent professors of economics, Abe Isoo (1865-1949) and Kawakami Hajime (1879-1946), regarding their socialist economic theories for easing poverty in Japan during the interwar years (1918-1939). Prior to this period, Abe believed the cure to capitalism's ills lay in a combination of socialist economic reforms (*sangyô demokurashii*) and individual spiritual refinement. Kawakami, at that time a bourgeois economist, prioritised the spiritual revolution of the rich over any socialist-type economic reform. Thus, although convinced of the need for a different approach to eradicating poverty, they nevertheless agreed in the need for gradual change rather than radical reform [30].

The year 1928 marked a significant turning point both for Japanese social movements and in the lives of Abe and Kawakami. That year heralded Japan's first national election under the new Universal Male Suffrage Law, and saw the police exercise their extended authority as they undertook a nationwide round-up of students and intellectuals suspected of left-wing tendencies (the March 15 Incident). Also in that year, Abe and Kawakami resigned from academic posts to dedicate themselves to alleviating the privations of the working class. Abe,

by then well known as the father of Japanese socialism and as a Christian pacifist, became a symbolic figure for Japan's working class parties, although he later came to support the government during WWII. Kawakami, who was forced to resign from his post during the round-up, "washed his hands of bourgeois economics", became a prominent spokesman for Marxism in Japan ([28], xi, pp. 76, 169). This article will reveal that both Abe and Kawakami's social and economic theories changed during the interwar period, so that Abe came to see imperial sovereignty as crucial to socialist economic reform, while Kawakami came to see it as a minion of the capitalists and advocated institutional and political revolution.

Keywords National polity (*kokutai*), unemployment, overpopulation, birth control, economic reform, austerity campaign, state economic control

Introduction

Abe Isoo, one of the most eminent intellectuals of the Meiji era (1868-1912), was a professor of economics at Tokyo Senmon Gakkô (the present Waseda University). Born into the samurai class in its declining days, he developed a concern about poverty and social inequality as a child. In 1881 he converted to Christianity while studying at Doshisha (the present Doshisha University). Then, while studying at Hartford Theological Seminary in the United States, he read Edward Bellamy's utopian classic, *Looking Backward*, and began to refer to himself as a socialist. Upon returning to Japan in 1895, Abe started proposing socialist solutions to the "social problems" at a time when these ideas were still new to the Japanese. His *Shakai mondai kaishakuhô* (Solutions for the Social Problem, 1901) was a systematic analysis of the country's prevailing social hardships and his recommendations for alleviating them. It was a revelation to his contemporaries and became essential reading for economics students in the early twentieth century ([52], pp. 11-12).

Since establishing Japan's first Social Democratic Party (*Shakai minshutô*) in 1901, Abe's fundamental interests remained economic in nature. With Kôtoku Shûsui he co-wrote the party's manifesto ("Manifesto of the Social Democratic Party") (*Shakai minshutô sengensho*, 1901), which declared the elimination of inequality between the affluent and the poor as the

most serious challenge of the twentieth century. No sooner had the Social Democratic Party been established than it was banned by the government. Under the Public Order Police Law (*chian keisatsuhô*) of 1900 it became unlawful to campaign against the authorities and to organize workers into a trade union ([52], p. 104).

Early in his thinking about socialism and the labour movement, Abe regarded New Zealand as a paragon of fairness, a country whose state-level policies for the relief of social hardship could serve as a model for Japan. In essence, he was convinced that the establishment of socialism required the state to have an authoritarian, centralized control of the economy. Although he never visited New Zealand, he was inspired by what he took to be the “existing model of a socialist state” in that country ([29], p. 393).

Throughout the period of political suppression, Abe also promoted team sports such as baseball and rowing, in order to instill in people a spirit of fair play and team cooperation (abiding by rules and the captain’s instructions); qualities that he believed would be required of citizens in the coming social order ([31], pp. 500, 600). While he awaited the passage of the Universal Suffrage Law, he steadfastly opposed calls to take direct action against the government. Instead, he saw himself as preserving “a flickering flame of socialist knowledge” at Waseda University ([60], pp. 140, 162). Despite this, the authorities continued to identify

him as a “dangerous” intellectual whose activities called for “close observation at all times” ([57], pp. 47-48).

Kawakami Hajime was a gifted journalist and became a self-proclaimed “special Marxist”. He was born in Chôshû, the hometown of the loyal patriotic “man of will” (*shishi*), Yoshida Shôin (1830-1859). Kawakami revered Yoshida as a hero and derived his early pen name, *Bai'in*, from him. When he was a law student at the Tokyo Imperial University, he read Confucius’ *Analects*. It was also at this time that he first read the Buddhist scriptures and the Bible. As Gail Bernstein points out that early in his career, motivated by a Confucian humanitarianism, he was almost “religiously devoted to the work of redeeming the poor”. The traditional approach to ethics and politics which he derived from these texts initially made it difficult for him to accept Marxism ([28], xii).

While a student, Kawakami was caught up in the intellectual fervor sweeping the capital, running from one public lecture to another. Abe Isoo was one of the many orators Kawakami heard. After graduation, Kawakami worked as a journalist and a lecturer at various institutions in Tokyo. He also studied economics at a graduate school in the university. Early in his study of socialism, he was not convinced that it was politically feasible. While on the one hand he was critical of the “armchair theory” advocated by socialists which would hinder

the progress of state capitalism, on the other he was dissatisfied with the social and economic status quo ([28], pp. 21, 44). In 1906 Kawakami became a lecturer in law, then in economics — a discipline newly offered at Kyoto Imperial University. He quickly established himself as a leading writer on economic issues and published and translated foreign works at a prolific rate.

In his series of articles, *The Tale of Poverty (Bimbô Monogatari)* (1916), Kawakami stressed the necessity of self-restraint on the part of the rich, urging them to be more morally conscious. Bernstein maintains that *the Tale of Poverty* was “an immediate success and electrified the Japanese intellectual world”. Not only did it ensure Kawakami a permanent place in the history of Japanese economic thought, but it also marked a major turning point in his approach to Marxism. Immediately after its publication it came under attack from a Marxist economist, Kawakami’s former pupil, Kushida Tamizô. Kushida argued that poverty was caused by the exploitation of the workers by the capitalists, and therefore that its cure was to be found in the reform of distribution, and ultimately in the reformation of Japan’s social and economic institutions. Convinced by Kushida’s argument, in 1919 Kawakami suspended publication of the book and prepared to study Marxist economics” ([28], pp. 87, 94-95).

After a long struggle to reconcile his personal, moral and religious beliefs with what he perceived to be the scientific truth of Marxism, Kawakami became a prominent spokesman for Marxism in interwar Japan ([28], xi). His international reputation as an economic scholar, combined with his prominent position in the Kyoto Imperial University provided him with “greater freedom of speech than the popular socialists”. Contrary to the political oppression that Abe had faced, life on the Kyoto campus gave Kawakami “the financial security and legal protection necessary to pursue his studies in economic thought and to explore, relatively freely, such a ‘dangerous thought’ as Marxism, forbidden to those outside the imperial academic community” ([28], p. 104):

However, in 1928 a nationwide round-up of students and intellectuals suspected of left-wing tendencies forced Kawakami to resign from his academic post. In 1929 Kawakami collaborated with Ôyama Ikuo (1880-1955), a noted socialist (and Abe’s colleague at Waseda), to form the New Labor-Farmer Party (Shin rônôtô). This venture, however, was short-lived as the party folded in 1930. In 1932, at the age of fifty-three, Kawakami fulfilled his quest to become a member of the then illegal Communist Party of Japan. After several months of working underground, in 1933 he was arrested and imprisoned. He was not released until 1937. Unlike other communists, such as Nabeyama Sadachika and Sano Manabu (1892-1953),

who recanted their political convictions in prison, Kawakami remained true to his Marxist beliefs throughout his imprisonment.

The “Winter” and the “Thaw” of Socialism in Interwar Japan

Politically, interwar Japan was typified by the social and political oppression that followed the High Treason Incident (1910-1911), which marked the beginning of the “winter” of the socialist movement in Japan. The Incident saw twelve anarchists sentenced to death, and another twelve sentenced to life imprisonment for allegedly plotting to assassinate the Meiji emperor. Following the Incident, the Japanese government promoted the National Moral Movement (*kokumin dôtoku undô*) in order to unite the population and to defuse political dissent and economic discontent. The leader of the campaign, Inoue Tetsujirô (1856-1944), a professor of philosophy at Tokyo Imperial University, maintained that Japan’s national polity (*kokutai*) derived from its continuous imperial lineage and the worship of ancestors. Based on the Confucian notion that in order to maintain national polity people should demonstrate filial piety and loyalty to the emperor, the head of state, it was essential that Japanese affirm the notion of Japan as a family nation, its people as children of the emperor ([35], pp. 212-213). The campaign directed people towards an imperial ideology (*tennôsei*), which stressed

diligence and austerity, so that people were exhorted to address their financial difficulties by living humbly in the name of the emperor.

In the wake of the Bolshevik revolution in Russia (1917) and the Rice Riots (*kome sôdô*)(1918) at home, there was a temporary resurgence of leftist causes and socialist ideas. During the democratic campaign (Taisho democracy), an imperial-democratic movement (*minponshugi*), led by Yoshino Sakuzô, gained momentum. Yoshino believed that a combination of monarchy and democracy, like that in Great Britain, could be achieved. As F.Q. Quo points out, the question was “how to adopt some democratic ideology within the framework of emperor absolutism, *kokutai*”, yet Yoshino dared to question the sovereignty ([65], p. 25). As we will see Abe and Kawakami accepted this challenge with very different results.

Socialism, too, experienced a brief revival at this time, marking an end to its “winter”. The success of the Russian Revolution gave Marxism a new-found scientific credibility as the Bolshevik victory was tendered as proof of the social theory. Despite external oppression and internal conflicts and splits within their memberships, the Japan Socialist Association (*Nihon shakaishugi dômei*) and the Japan Communist Party were formed in 1920 and 1922 respectively. Abe belonged to the Japan Fabian Society (*Nihon Fabian kyôkai*), founded in

1922, which, similar to its equivalent in the United Kingdom, envisioned “a redistribution of wealth through extensive state measures”.¹

The first national election under the new Universal Male Suffrage Law was held in 1928, marking an epochal achievement in the development of democracy in Japan. It resulted in eight members from working class parties (proletariat, literally, the “property-less” parties) being elected to parliament. These included candidates from the communist Labour-Farmer Party (Rôdô nômintô), the more moderate Japan Labour-Farmer Party (Nihon rôdô nômintô), and the comparatively conservative Socialist People’s Party (Shakai minshûtô). Kawakami was involved in the Labour-Farmer Party, while Abe was chairman of the Socialist People’s Party, which he considered “the Japanese equivalent to the British Labour Party” ([56], pp. 425-426).² In hindsight, however, the passing of the Peace Preservation Law (*Chian ijihô*) (1925), which in 1928 extended the authority of the police, marked a death knell for the country’s left-wing political parties ([35], p. 98).³ All forms of political dissent against the national polity (*kokutai*) — deemed “dangerous thought” — were outlawed. After the brief flowering of the democratic movement in the 1920s, the 1930s represented a “dark valley” in Japanese politics — withdrawal from the League of Nations, military aggression towards China, the banning of political parties and trade unions, and the organization of an

ultra-nationalist military garrison state ([39], p. 217).

In the interwar years, the Japanese economy swung from the post-WWI boom through to the Great Depression. A chronic depression, particularly in the agricultural sector, was only compounded by the Great Kanto Earthquake of 1923, by monetary stagnation in 1927 and the Great Depression of 1929. The Depression triggered a national crisis in both the economy and in social and political thought. By the time of the Manchurian Incident in 1931, the Japanese government was desperate to advance its economic interests in China. Under the Major Industrial Control Act (*jūyō sangyō tōseihō*) (passed in 1930 to take effect in 1938), a policy of industrial rationalisation (*sangyō gōrika*) further strengthened the existing system of capitalist monopolies, which by this time had commenced large-scale production in order to meet the military's growing demands. In intent and effect, this policy increased the government's direct control over the country's economy (*keizai tōsei*). The National Moral Movement (*kokumin seishin sōdōin*, 1937) further consolidated state control at the grassroots.

The severe economic downturn exacerbated the dual problems of overpopulation and unemployment. The rapidly expanding population revealed in the second national census conducted in 1925 (following the first conducted in 1920), alerted many intellectuals to the extent of the problem and the pressure it was placing on the country's limited resources ([67],

pp. 6, 346). Some intellectuals, Abe among them, came to advocate birth control rather than emigration as the best solution to the population crisis.⁴ Unemployment was at its worst in 1930, when official figures put the number of unemployed in Japan at 500,000, while unofficial estimates placed it somewhere in excess of 2,500,000 ([64], p. 46).

By the early Shōwa period, from the late 1920s to the 1930s, capitalism in Japan had produced sequential economic depressions and a war ([51], pp. 135, 215). It was in the light of these socio-economic events and the political climate which spawned them that Abe and Kawakami began voicing their concerns about capitalist economics. This article now examines and compares Abe's recommendations for economic reform with those of Kawakami.

Creating a Socialist Economy yet Maintaining Imperial Sovereignty

It was against this tumultuous political backdrop that Abe and Kawakami advocated their different solutions for Japan's social, political and economic problems. Abe asserted that the government should address the country's extreme economic inequalities. He argued that it should eliminate the cause of these social evils rather than exercise ideological control and seek moral guidance from priests and monks (*shisō zendō*) to ease the tensions they create

“While privileged people feared revolutionary revenge, the working class sought political and economic equality, not retribution”. If the authorities wanted to guide people away from “dangerous thoughts”, he asserted, universal suffrage was far more effective than religious guidance in allowing them to give voice to their concerns ([2]; [3], pp. 200-201; [4], pp. 102-104; [6], p. 2).⁵

Having long awaited the passage of the Universal Suffrage Law, Abe claimed that this provided an ideal opportunity for Japan to take a parliamentary approach to address the cause of the unfair distribution of wealth. Reiterating Sydney Webb’s warning that capitalism had reached the last stage of its development, that it threatened to collapse under the strain of its own internal contradictions, he urged the need for reform.

One can’t live on bread alone and one can’t maintain high thinking without having first secured life’s necessities. Unlike intellectuals, physical workers don’t possess time for self-reflection or for the enjoyment of science and technology. Restricting such enjoyment to a small minority transgresses humanitarianism and has created an unhealthy social situation ([5], p. 4; [9], pp. 13-14, 15-16).

Abe believed that the truly “dangerous thoughts” lay in the cause of the unfair distribution of wealth, which would hinder people from achieving a higher goal than material well-being.

As the chairman of the Socialist People’s Party, Abe asserted that the Party aimed to legally abolish “political party-ism”, educate working class people and thereby create a new society by democratic, constitutional means. “As long as capitalism exists, the problem of unemployment will persist. The affluent could not have obtained their assets without the support of the workers, therefore they should assist counter measures taken to ease the current situation” ([8], p. 21; [9], pp. 2, 10-11, 17; [10], pp. 61-62).⁶ At this stage, Abe advocated the continuation of capitalism, but with a more worker-oriented economy, one ameliorated by a compassionate, more humane social policy instigated by the bourgeoisie.

In the Party manifesto, Abe clarified the differences between his Socialist People’s Party and Kawakami’s Labor-Farmer Party (Rônôtô), arguing that the former advocated democratic parliamentary reform within the framework of existing institutions, i.e., the national polity (*kokutai*) was sacrosanct and above politics, while the latter stood on a platform of revolutionary change ([9], pp. 2, 10-11, 17; [11], pp. 35-37). He maintained that, if supported by the masses, social reform could be realised gradually, through the Parliament, without any need for revolution. “This bespeaks the democratic spirit of Britain compared with that of

revolutionary Russia. While people might envisage an ideal society, they should still maintain their dignity and a cooperative spirit". Social evolution, he believed, would start with the individual and was antithetical to both communism and capitalism ([9], p. 20; [11], pp. 31, 34).⁷

However, the outbreak of the Manchurian Incident marked a major turning point for both Abe and the working class parties. While the Communist Party and the Japan Labour-Farmer Masses Party (Zenkoku rônô taishûtô) criticized the government for the Manchurian Incident, referring to it as an invasion of China, the Socialist People's Party supported it ([61], pp. 324, 333; [58], pp. 222-223). This pro-war stance advocated by the Party's secretary, Akamatsu Katsumaro and other right-wing members, became the major source of the internal discord that split the Party ([51], pp. 212, 205-206). In 1932, following the defeat of the working class parties in the second general election (1930), Abe became the chairman of the Social Masses Party (Shakai taishûtô), an amalgamation of the Japan Labour-Farmer Masses Party (Nihon rônô taishûtô) and former members of the Socialist People's Party who opposed the pro-war stance advocated by right-wing members. Abe declared that the Party opposed communism and fascism and aimed to replace Japan's capitalist economy with a socialist one ([12]). Firmly opposed to communism, Abe emphasized the differences between his political vision

and that of the state socialism advocated by Akamatsu and others.

Abe's Changing Views of Socialist Economic Reform — Under the National Polity (*kokutai*)

Obinata Sumio points out that Abe's loss in the 1930 election undermined his belief that economic reform could be achieved through constitutional democracy. When the government introduced the Main Industry Control Act, Abe perceived it as an opportunity to implement the socialist, command economy he had long advocated. In his inaugural speech marking the establishment of the Social Masses Party, he asserted that "state economic control is another term for the practice of the socialist economy that I have been recommending". In the event of a possible war with the United States, it was necessary to control the economy and, for Abe, the term "controlled economy" encapsulated the essential elements of a socialist economy ([58], pp. 220, 234). He came to see greater state control under imperial sovereignty as a way of realizing the socialist economy he had long envisioned.

At the time of the Meiji Restoration (1868), the Tokugawa shogunate returned its political power to the emperor, the *shogun's* retainers (*daimyō*) gave up their domains, and *samurai* surrendered not only their stipend but also their two swords,

the symbolic identity of their class. In Japan, the emperor has sovereignty over all his subjects (*ikkun banmin*) and in times of national emergency it is quite proper to restore all industrial rights to the emperor ([13], pp. 1-2, 46-47).

Recommending that all industrial rights be ceded to the Shōwa emperor (*Shōwa ishin*), Abe now linked national polity (*kokutai*) with his economic reform. As such, he prioritized his economic considerations over his political commitment to democracy.

Contrary to his earlier view that national polity was above politics, Abe now envisioned increased state control of the economy under the imperial sovereignty as “a splendid cure for unemployment” (*rippana kaiketsu*) (cited in [71], p. 94). He saw the National General Mobilization Law (*kokka sōdōin hō*, 1938) as an opportunity to not only reform Japan’s capitalist economy by further centralizing its command under the state, but also as a way of instituting a vital component of his social vision — the importance of humble living. This sentiment was encapsulated in his favorite maxim, borrowed from Ralph Waldo Emerson (1803-1882), “plain living and high thinking” (*shisso no seikatsu kōen no risō*) ([20], p. 1). He believed, whether in times of war or peace, humble living was a prerequisite for spiritual enlightenment. As such, he envisioned the Mobilization Law as a means to a higher end:

“Those who are preoccupied with material wealth cannot spare a minute for refining their mind: those who can endure plain living will reach spiritual enlightenment as the reward for being thrifty” ([15], p. 3; [16], p. 3; [20], pp. 3-4). He thus considered the kind of “plain living” imposed on people by the wartime environment to be essential to their spiritual fulfillment. To this end, Yamaizumi Susumu maintains that Abe’s socialist vision is characterized by his emphasis on moral refinement as a means of solving economic hardship ([72], pp. 394, 491).

However, it is important to note that Abe’s conviction regarding moral refinement, along with his law-abiding attitude, was compatible with the wartime government’s austerity campaign. His deference to the law was reflected in his promotion of the virtues of team sports such as baseball, wherein the rules of the game and the captain’s instructions were beyond question. He argued, “if we are to remain constitutional, we must abide by the law — as far as it is effective — even if it is a bad one” ([23], p. 14). Employing a nautical metaphor, he made a similar point where he suggested that during an emergency all the passengers aboard the *Nihon maru* (Japanese ship) must follow the captain’s navigational commands. “We must persevere with rationing and prevent a recurrence of black markets ... When the war is over, things will be back to normal” ([24], p. 3; [26], p. 3). Okamoto Hiroshi argues that once the war became the ultimate goal of the state, Abe’s advocacy of material

self-restraint and his law-abiding attitude encouraged people to endure their economic adversity ([62], p. 50).

Abe's underlying conviction regarding the potential of imperial sovereignty to generate a socialist economy, as Izuhara Masao argues, made his support of the wartime government seem inevitable at a time of global economic crisis ([36], pp. 289, 306). Hirose, too, suggests that the "war engendered the kind of national solidarity that he craved" ([33], p. 290). Abe wrote, "the ultimate purpose of the savings drive was to have all Japanese — affluent and destitute alike, young and old, men and women — practice austerity (*setsuyaku*) and dedicate their lives and assets to the imperial state". He went on to argue that if everybody made sacrifices for the sake of the imperial state (*kokka no tameni*) "we could save the 800 hundred million yen urgently required by the government" ([15], pp. 3-4; [18], pp. 1-2; [19], pp. 1-2).

Beyond his conviction regarding imperial authority, as Obinata Sumio maintains, Abe was also committed to the wartime economy because he considered it to be essentially socialist in nature ([17] cited in [59], p. 232). In this way, during the war, Abe abandoned his social democratic rhetoric and became an advocate for a top-down centralization of the economy by the wartime government. So much so that when the government banned all political protest, he welcomed it as an "amicable" change.

In peace people argue over various matters, however, in times of war people are unified, just as we are today. It is pleasing that the parliament consolidates its power to deal with this national crisis. One only hopes that this kind of solidarity can occur in more stable times ([17] cited in [33], p. 297).

While Hirose maintains that Abe unconditionally believed in the need for the emperor's absolute control of the economy in order to cure the country's economic ills, Okamoto points out that Abe's attitude to imperial sovereignty was pragmatic, and was aimed solely at the establishment of a socialist economy ([61], p. 341; [62], pp. 31, 43, 47). However, Abe's pragmatism failed to account for how the imperial sovereignty's ownership of land and industry would benefit the people ([33], p. 282). Stephen Large claims that Abe and others, such as Yoshino Sakuzô who advocated a form of imperial democracy, failed to perceive the close link between capitalism and the imperial system" ([54], pp. 113, 162).

Hirose argues that Abe was not aware of the difference between his ideal of self-restraint and the austerity campaign enforced by the wartime government. As such, his law-abiding attitude might explain his turning a blind eye to the fact that the National General

Mobilization Law did not apply the same austerity measures to imperial authorities as it did to members of the general public. To this end, Izuhara Masao points out that Abe's indifference to such political realities raises questions about his political credentials (Personal interview 14 December 2008 at Doshisha University.)

Another shift in Abe's preferred approach to solving a crucial social issue is found in his recommendations for easing the overpopulation crisis. Throughout the 1920s, he had recommended birth control, the New Malthusian approach, as a solution to the overpopulation crisis. However, once Japan was engaged in the war with China, Abe did an about face on this issue and supported the government's pro-natal policies: "give birth and multiply" (*umeyo fuyaseyo*). He maintained that birth control was outdated and a large population would prove crucial to Japan in facing the twin powers of the United States and Britain ([14] cited in [36], p. 306; also see [55]). Revoking his earlier position, he now argued that a small population could not survive a war.

Abe recommended that early marriage would be ideal, not only for expanding the populace but also for maintaining morale between men and women. "Keep the wedding ceremonies simple so that couples can afford to marry young. If necessary, deploy national polity *kokutai* to enforce it" ([22], p. 3; [25], pp. 2-3). Abe came to see that the wartime national drive for

population increase would help institute his “ideal” of moral refinement, “a clean sweep of public morality ... placing equal stress on the importance of the moral issue” ([71], p. 95). As Tipton maintains, Abe rightfully believed that the war would help solve two of his most long-standing social concerns: prostitution and poverty.

Throughout the interwar years Abe’s Christian socialist concerns remained consistent, though he changed his preferred method of addressing them. He always believed such issues would be resolved through a command economy, but rather than this being achieved through a democratic process, he became persuaded by the efficacy of the wartime economy and his economic adaptation of *kokutai*. Cyril Powles maintains that:

A dichotomy in his ideas between spiritual-personal and economic-social saved Abe from the radical alienation experienced by colleagues such as Kôtoku and Ôsugi ... Abe’s pacifism was based on his Christian faith and his cosmopolitan socialism, and the division of life into religion (personal salvation) and economics (social salvation) allowed him to preserve a kind of balance. He could appear in public as an economic humanist and practical tactician, while remaining a puritanical non-conformist in private life ([64], pp. 146, 149, 164).

Powles concludes that “Abe never fully came to grips with a total view of society in which political and economic structures are seen as comprising a system that generates or maintains certain values and relations” ([64], p. 165).

State control of the economy, however, did not proceed as Abe had expected. A new economic guideline (*Keizai shintaisei kakuritu yôkô*, 1940) further consolidated a system whereby capitalist monopolies were empowered to produce the goods to meet the military’s demands. He finally realised that the wartime government was committed to retaining a capitalist regime and that the state directive he had supported was in fact sacrificing the very people he had spent his life trying to help. Hirose argues that Abe must have been enormously disappointed with the guideline for him to resign from the House of Representatives and withdraw from the Party as he did in 1940.⁸ The moment came when Saitô Takao, Minseitô (Parliament) member, was expelled from the Diet as punishment for criticising Japan’s “holy war” in China. Abe protested Saito’s expulsion as an infringement of his freedom of speech. Subsequently, Abe tried to form a new party, the Nationalist Labor Party (Kinrô kokumintô). ([19], pp. 1-2; [20], p. 2; [33], p. 295). However, as Tipton points out, “the Home Ministry banned it on the grounds that it was socialist and that, representing the working class, it would

instigate class struggle” ([71], p. 94).

Kawakami Hajime — From Imperial Scholar to Marxist Theorist

The Rice Riots of 1918 dramatically altered Kawakami’s attitude towards “dangerous thoughts” and the impoverishment of workers, and their lack of freedom of expression. After the riots Kawakami came to believe that workers should be embraced as the generators of positive social reform. They were, he argued, the mother of social evolution, as had been demonstrated fifty years earlier with the Meiji Restoration, when reformers successfully enacted such a “dangerous thought”. He argued that while the Restoration was dangerous to those who sought to maintain their own privilege, it benefited all those who wanted society to develop as a whole ([40], pp. 162-163, 168). He was convinced of the need for a humanitarian revolution which would improve individual rights at the grassroots. Gail Bernstein reveals that Kawakami alluded to his new, more radical views in “Soliloquy of an Unnamed Doctor” (Aru isha no hitorigoto)(1919). “To cure the patient, a little blood must flow for there was no other way to restore the patient to good health. Kawakami, the self-declared physician for Japanese society, was prescribing drastic reform, possibly even revolution” ([41] cited in [28], p. 101).⁹

Of the heated debate about unemployment and overpopulation sparked by the second national census in 1925, Kawakami argued that it was based on incorrect assumptions. He espoused Marx's theory of population in a capitalist society, which opposed the Malthusian principle that a surplus of people outruns the growth of production and thus causes unemployment and poverty ([47], p. 13). Gail Bernstein articulates Kawakami's contention: "It does not explain why only some people are poor, while others are rich. Further, with the advent of machine technology, it has become possible for material productivity to outstrip population increase. Hence poverty can not be attributed to overpopulation" ([28], p. 99). He argued that when capitalists increase fixed capital (machines, etc.) to update production techniques in order to be more competitive, the declining rate of profit results in the redundancy of more workers. This, then, rather than an increase in the population, is the true cause of unemployment ([47], pp. 11, 13).

Kawakami also disagreed with the New Malthusian approach to birth control, contraception, as advocated at the time by Abe and others. He argued that Japan's unemployment was the result of the workers' bondage to capitalist production and that birth control would only make matters worse because it would lower the birth rate but not the rate of unemployment. He argued that Japan's unemployment rate bespoke capitalism's decline, a phenomenon prevalent

not only in Japan but in many other industrialized countries ([47], pp. 20-22).¹⁰

Kawakami considered the conventional account of the population crisis as “a biased view which equated Japanese to wild silkworms”, subject to more rigorous scientific study. He argued that birth control aimed to treat the symptoms rather than address the causes of the illness of Japan’s capitalist economy. For these reasons, Kawakami agreed with the conclusions drawn by the two major national newspapers, *Osaka Asahi* and *Osaka Daily* (*Osaka Mainichi*), when they proclaimed that no practical recommendations to ease the problem had been presented by the government ([47], pp. 9, 17, 19, 20-22).

Kawakami argued that capitalists always resisted efforts by the working class to improve their standard of living and employed state scholars to preach frugality to the masses in order to oppress them. He concluded that all such passive measures — self-restraints of desires and birth control — failed to apprehend people’s lives in terms of social relations, and thought of them only in terms of food, thereby equating them with wild animals ([42], pp. 27, 36). Sugihara Shirô maintains that Kawakami viewed the population crisis in terms of class struggle and the maintenance of the Japanese race, two issues that he saw as complementary rather than in conflict ([67], p. 356).

Convinced by Marx’s theory of surplus value, whereby capitalist profits were gained

through paying workers less than the full value of their labor, Kawakami criticised Abe's "armchair theory". He argued that political opportunists such as Abe sought to liberate the working class from capitalist oppression without fundamentally altering the power structures of Japanese society. They neglected the daily efforts of the class struggle and instead advocated an ideal of classless cooperation. "Workers only possessed their capacity to work and the potential power to act collectively as a class" therefore, Abe's approach, he asserted, would never achieve the liberation of the working class, something that would only result from direct action undertaken by the New Labor-Farmer Party ([43], pp. 4, 21-22, 29, 32-33; [45], p. 15).

Referring to Abe's Manifesto of the Socialist People's Party (*Shakai minshûtô kôryô*), Kawakami accused Abe of attributing the cause of "dangerous thoughts" to people's daily hardships. As we have seen, Abe recommended that the government take tangible steps to ease the harsh living conditions of working people rather than attempt to control their thoughts. Kawakami though argued that the impoverishment of the workers derived from capitalism, and that efforts to ameliorate this from within the capitalist framework would only serve to reinforce it. In essence, such reforms would further encourage the working class to embrace a revolutionary solution ([46], pp. 180-182).

Furthermore, Kawakami argued, “Mr Abe sees the unequal distribution of wealth as the cause of degrading society through its attack on the humanitarian spirit, limiting enjoyment of the arts and science to a tiny, privileged minority”. Kawakami warned that if the issue of the unequal distribution of wealth had already registered with the oppressed, then capitalism was already outdated and its successor, socialism, was waiting on the doorstep ([46], p. 213).

According to the press, Kawakami claimed that the chairman of the Socialist People’s Party, Abe, had stated that the party would accept donations for the general election campaign from “discreet” capitalists. Kawakami argued that the recipients of such donations would similarly be “discreet” when they bargained away the interests of workers during future capitalist-labor negotiations. Hence, although he sought solidarity with all other working class parties, Kawakami felt obliged to oppose Abe’s party, which he believed was a minion of the capitalists ([48], pp. 6-8). Kawakami argued that so-called industrial rationalization (*sangyô gôrika*) mechanised production but did nothing to improve the conditions of workers, and that the government had camouflaged its real intention by confusing people with the distinction between the two. “Mechanization”, in effect, dispensed with unwanted workers. Mass production driven by machines required less time and manpower to increase capitalists’ profits. Some unions under the leadership of the Socialist People’s Party and the Japanese

Masses Party (Nihon taishûtô) had in fact already agreed with the capitalists that they would cooperate in promoting labor efficiency. Kawakami argued that this so-called increased work efficiency (which equated to increased production in less time) was merely a new strategy by industrialists to increase their exploitation of workers in the declining stage of capitalism ([49], pp. 28-31, 31-34).

Contrary to Prime Minister Hamaguchi's assertion that industrial rationalization would increase production and ease unemployment, Kawakami argued that it had produced a new phenomenon — permanent unemployment. As borne out by the effects of the Great Depression, he claimed that countries such as the United States and Germany would have higher unemployment than other countries because of their greater use of mass production. Such rationalization of production would, he argued, be effective in the Soviet Union, because the economy was controlled by the state. He concluded that what mattered most was not the absolute number of unemployed, but whether the rate of unemployment was rising or falling. Only if it were in decline could one expect the problem of unemployment to be resolved ([49], pp. 45-46, 49).

Kawakami maintained that under the current economic organization, capitalists in every country had to expand their markets overseas in order to increase profits. Such exploitation

deprived the oppressed masses of essential domestic goods. In order to repel other capitalists from one's own territory, intermittent armed conflict took place. Politicians, then, were servants of the capitalist class, waging imperialist wars when industry demanded. Workers and farmers had to avoid wars, which benefited the military industry by neglecting the production of general commodities ([50], pp. 198-200). Hence, a political party representing farmers and labor was honor-bound to oppose such capitalist-inspired conflicts and to adopt an anti-war stance.

Unlike Abe who became rigidly focused on establishment of a command economy under national polity, Kawakami believed that lasting, structural change was possible; that his Party could over-turn the economic and political status quo. However, soon after successfully sending Ôyama to the Diet, Kawakami became disillusioned with his political ally who, "deep down inside was not a communist", and had no intention of realizing a revolution ([45] cited in [28], pp. 153-154). After Kawakami broke with Ôyama, the Party soon folded and Kawakami became increasingly involved with the communist cause. While he hoped to voice the concerns of workers and farmers, and to ease their unemployment and better their living conditions through direct action against the national polity, Kawakami's underground activities resulted in his arrest and lengthy imprisonment, which effectively isolated him from

the people he hoped to support.

Conclusion

As we have seen, in the face of severe economic recession and the political oppression during the interwar period, both Abe and Kawakami attempted to alleviate poverty among Japanese workers and unemployed through leftist causes and their advocacy of various socialist ideas.

Abe was convinced that a controlled economy could eliminate unemployment and that a lack of economic reform was endangering the fabric of Japanese life. His reform agenda contained two main goals: one, state ownership of industry, and two, individual self-restraint. The former required greater state control of the economy, similar to the imperial authority imposed in order to bring about the political reform of the Meiji Restoration. The latter, he believed, could not only solve the population crisis, but also help institute moral refinement. Abe turned a blind eye to the political consequences of his support for the war effort because, in his mind, the war was not an end in itself but a means of achieving the higher goal of “plain living and high thinking”. This desire for moral refinement was the crucial difference between Abe and the imperial capitalists whose sole goal lay in the military expansion of overseas economic markets. It also presents a point of clear distinction with Kawakami, who considered that

workers who were already impoverished did not need more austerity, but rather better living conditions.

Kawakami argued that imperial sovereignty was a capitalist tool for expanding economic markets at the expense of workers and, as such, derided Abe's "armchair theory". Universal suffrage and parliamentary democracy had failed to improve the living conditions of the working class and instead had further entrenched their poverty, forcing them to fight in imperialist wars. Birth control and austerity campaigns, he argued, would endanger the very existence of the Japanese race. Both the current government and working class representatives such as Abe did the bidding of the capitalists and ignored the scientific proof demonstrated by the Russian Revolution that the bourgeoisie was not about to cede its economic power voluntarily. Unlike Abe, Kawakami saw the Meiji Restoration as a historically proven example of a successful social revolution, and believed that the oppressed workers must unite and violently overthrow the capitalist class. As Bernstein articulates, "he saw in Marxism a superior method of reform" ([28], p. 166).

Neither Abe nor Kawakami were able to realise their economic and political goals under the Peace Preservation Law, but both remained dedicated to representing what they perceived to be the interests of the Japanese working class. When the country faced an unprecedentedly

severe economic crisis, both of these economics scholars considered it dangerous that people were being deprived of new ideas that sought to better society and the lives of the majority of its people. The crucial difference in their views concerning the function of national polity could be partly attributed to the differing academic environment each faced prior to resigning their teaching posts. While teaching at Kyoto Imperial University, Kawakami could, for two decades, officially study such “dangerous thoughts” as Marxism, something forbidden beyond the Kyoto campus. From this privileged vantage point he came to see the national polity as a capitalist tool. In contrast, Abe had struggled under authoritarian political oppression to maintain the “flickering flame of socialism” at Waseda University and in this context saw the national polity as sacrosanct. However, beyond Waseda, he came to envisage it as a means of consolidating the state’s command in a socialist economy.

Abe (at least until the war was over) abandoned key elements of his pacifist and democratic beliefs in the hope of realizing his dream of a socialist economy. His overwhelming commitment to the idea of an authoritarian command economy made his wartime political theories compatible with a movement towards right-wing militarism. It is plausible that although he remained politically non-resistant on the one hand, he envisaged on the other that he was preparing for at least a moral refinement in anticipation of realising a socialist

institution.

Kawakami was forced to abandon his political campaign but remained true to his Marxist convictions. The development of Kawakami's theory followed a more conventional arc from bourgeois, orthodox economics, towards a belief in revolutionary change, gradually underpinned by a conviction regarding historical materialism and Marxist dialectics. Before the two World Wars, both these pioneering scholars in economics respected each other's political theories and agreed in a gradual transition of society, rather than revolutionary reform. However, during the interwar years, they came to openly oppose each other's visions for solving Japan's economic ills.

Notes

¹ For clarification, the name, "Socialist People's Party", is adopted for the Shakai minshûtô 社会民衆党 (1928) throughout this paper in order to distinguish it from Abe's first political party, the Social Democratic Party (Shakai minshutô 社会民主党, 1901), and also from the Social Masses Party (Shakai taishûtô 社会大衆党, 1932).

Abe expressed his heartfelt regret that the rupture in the alliance between working class parties resulted in a split between the labor and farmer unions. He maintained that the working class party, the Socialist People's Party, aimed at establishing a worker-oriented economy and society which could be achieved within ten years if all working people belonged to a representative party. He stressed that the fundamental solution for eliminating unemployment lay in the rationalization of industry at the state level and by the state's command control, resulting in army-like efficiency. However, it is important to note that his vision of an "army like" controlled organization was inspired by his meeting with William Booth, the founder of the Salvation Army, in the UK in 1904. ([27], pp. 222-223. Also see [37], pp. 192-194).

² Stephen Large points out that "despite their cleavages in the socialist party movement, the political platforms of these parties were remarkably similar" ([54], pp. 9, 106, 115).

When Shimonaka Yasaburô, the president of the Heibonsha publishing company and a member of the Non-Party Clique (Mutôha), established the joint council for working class

parties (Musanseitô gôdô sokushin kyôgikai), each working class party dispatched “influential” representatives to the council. Kawakami was the sole delegate from his party, yet he became one of the five members of the council elected to the executive committee. ([56], pp. 425-426).

³ In 1932 Abe left the Socialist People’s Party in protest of the extreme form of the state socialism advocated by its secretary, Akamatsu Katsumaro and other key members of the party. He then became the chairman of the Social Masses Party (Shakai taishûtô), an amalgamation of two working class parties that opposed communism, fascism and capitalism ([58], p. 234).

Throughout the 1920s, parliamentary politics in Japan was in turmoil, with bribery and political corruption reaching a peak in 1929. Ultimately, this crisis resulted in the two coup d’états of 15 May 1932 and 26 February 1936, which signaled an end to party politics and the rise of fascism. By 1940 all political parties were dissolved and absorbed into organisations to promote war efforts such as the Imperial Rule Assistance Association (*taisei yokusankai*) and the Greater Japan Industrial Patriotic Association (*sangyô hōkokukai*).

⁴ Well before the 1925 census, in 1922, Abe and Yamamoto Senji (1889-1929) supported a visit to Japan by Margaret Sanger, an American advocate of birth control. Abe, with Ishimoto Keikichi and other intellectuals, founded the Japan Birth Control Research Association (Nihon sanji chōsetsu kenkyūkai) and continued advocating birth control in print and public seminars into the early 1930s ([70], p. 91).

⁵ For Abe, the Kyoto University student incident (Kyōdai gakuren jiken) revealed a serious contradiction in the education system, whereby the ideas of social science, which inspire students to work for the betterment of society, were suppressed by the government. At school, students should be encouraged to study social sciences in order to understand their roles within society. He argued that unlike in the West, in Japan the link between school and society was nebulous ([7] in: [60], pp. 13-14).

⁶ In the Party manifesto, Abe called for “disarmament within the limits required for national defence.” He also contended that the government should tax those who sought an exemption from conscription and should redistribute this revenue to the bereaved families of the war dead as compensation for their losses. The reasoning was that those avoiding war service were no longer abiding by the law and as such were not being loyal and patriotic ([7], p. 21: [9], pp. 2, 10-11, 17: [10], pp. 61-62).

⁷ Abe believed that the existing political parties were corrupt and that they should be replaced with working class parties in order to create a truly democratic parliamentary government. While a politician, he strove to eliminate public prostitution, which he saw as a primary cause of moral disorder. Also, he supported a Clean Election Movement (*senkyo shukusei undō*), an ethical overhaul of the election process, which spread nation-wide with a passage of universal male suffrage ([11], pp. 31, 34).

⁸ Tipton points out that Abe attempted to form the Kinrō kokumintō, usually translated as the “National Labor Party,” but literally, Party of Industrious Working Citizens. This article [also] views the literal translation more suitable but substituting “People” in place of “Citizens.” Abe’s focus lay in establishing a party for the workers (people) who would work industriously for the sake of the imperial state rather than for “national” cohesion.

⁹ Kawakami espoused Marxist theory in his journal, *Shakai mondai kenkyū* (Research in social problems) (1919-1930), which attracted a wide readership. In 1927 he articulated his new-found understanding of Marxism in *Yuibutsushikan ni kansuru jiko kessan* (A personal

settlement of accounts with historical materialism). He followed this up in 1928 with the publication of the scholarly *An introduction to Shihonron nyûmon* (Das Kapital), and *Keizaigaku taikô* (The outline of political economy). These works helped to introduce and spread Marxist thought not only in Japan but also in China. Kawakami's later work, *Daini bimbô monogatari* (The second tale of poverty, 1929-1930), was an introduction to the Marxist notion of dialectical materialism, and it too attracted a wide readership ([28], p. 101).

¹⁰ Abe held the seminar on 15 January (1923) and subsequent seminars were scheduled to be held in Kobe, Kyoto, Nagoya, Okayama and other areas ([47], pp. 20-22).

Sugihara contends that the underlying reason Kawakami opposed birth control was that he believed it would deplete the Japanese race and that he expressed this view in "Nihon son nôron" (1905) ([67], p. 347).