

CHAPTER XI

MANY EDITORS IMPRISONED

Many newspaper editors were punished by the new press law. Tetcho Suychiro, of the Akebono Shimbun, Joun Kurimoto, of the Yubin Hochi, Ryuhoku Narushima, of the Choya Shimbun, and many others were fined or imprisoned on account of articles printed in their papers criticising the Government. Tetcho Suyehiro was punished with a fine of ten yen and imprisonment for one month for publishing articles against the Government. The press law thus became a puzzle to newspaper editors as to its application. They wondered if any article against the Government was to be regarded as a violation of the press law, and why they should be obedient to such an absurd ruling. Then, some leading newspaper writers met in conference and discussed the matter. It was attended by Fukuchi, of the Tokyo Nichi-Nichi, Fujita, of the Hochi, Narushima, of the Choya, Suyehiro, of the Akebono, and Fumihiko Yokose, of the Hyoron Shimbun. At last they came to a decision that they would write various articles for test and send them in to the authorities asking which of these should be regarded as a violation of the press law.

The purports of these articles were, first, "The press law cannot go side by side with freedom of speech", second, "Judge A lacks experience and his judgment is unfair," and third, "The despotic Government cannot rule this country forever, the establishment of the Diet must be hastened." Sending in articles to the above effect to the authorities, they inquired whether the first of these established a criticism of the present law, if the

second was a libel on the judge and the third was the expression of a view threatening the style of government. These inquiries were returned unreplyed to by the authorities.

Suyehiro wrote in his biography, as to his imprisonment:

"I was sleepy, so trying to have a nap I laid myself on the floor. It was very hot that day. I overheard a jailor saying to himself that a newspaper editor should not be punished like this. Even a jailor thought so. What idea had the judge in imprisoning me?"

The prison where they were held was one which had been completed shortly before. It was built after the style of prisons in Europe. Newspaper editors were sent there one after another. Among them were Yeitaro Komatsubara, who was the editor of the Hyoron Shimbun and later died as a privy councillor, Tei-ichi Sugita, former President of the House of Representatives who was the editor of the Saifu, and Katsundo Minoura, of the Hochi, now a member of the House of Representatives.

In this way, the Government tried to oppress all anti-Government elements in the press, but failed eventually. The law was most unpopular among the people. Even among the Ministers of the Government were some who opposed it. The law was originated by Toshimitsu Okubo, then Home Minister. It was opposed by Hisomu Mayejima, then Minister of Communications, but he was powerless to persuade Okubo to abolish the law. The power of Okubo at that time was supreme. Mayejima in his

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autobiography wrote, "The press law was inaugurated by Toshimitsu Okubo, then Minister of Home Affairs. What was his real object in issuing this law, I do not know. Okubo said to me that he did not care about any criticisms of the press law. The law, he said, was necessary to cope with the situation at that time. Observers must somewhat sympathize with him."

The Government oppression brought about quite unexpected results in increasing the popularity and, as a natural consequence, the circulation, of newspapers. The Choya Shimbun, for instance, which had suffered from financial difficulties, became prosperous with a circulation increased to 6,000 a day in August 1876, when Tetcho Suyehiro, the famous editor, joined the staff of the paper as managing editor, leaving the Akebono Shimbun which was to be purchased by the Government, although this did not materialise. The circulation of the Choya further increased to 18,000 a day in January the following year.

It must be observed that the people are the best judges of newspapers at any time. They do not like Government organs. Independent papers are exactly what they want. The rise and fall of the Tokyo Nichi-Nichi explains this fully. When it continued as a Government organ its power was declining but when it became an independent paper its ascendancy reached the zenith. It is needless to say that the Government oppression could not alter the people's mind in choosing free papers.

Japan in 1887 or so, twenty years after the Meiji Restoration, had a curious tendency to follow European manners and habits blindly which was motivated by the Government

itself. People first began to wear foreign clothes and spend evenings in dancing and music. There were some radicals who even advocated the change of the national language and the adoption of English as their own tongue. Text-books used at schools were all in English and were taught by foreigners. This radical and silly attempt was resorted to by the Government in order to obtain the westerners' sympathy so that they would yield to Japan's demand for the alteration of the treaties with foreign Powers which were a sort of humiliation to Japan and more disgraceful to her than the Brest-Litovsk Treaty forced upon Russia by Germany. The dancing parties which were held at the Rokumei Kwan or the Hall of Singing Deer almost every night attracted many westernised ladies and gentlemen, as well as foreigners. Kaoru Inouye was then Minister of Foreign Affairs and was trying his best to revise the treaties. The Cabinet, headed by Hirobumi Ito as Prime Minister, had Aritomo Yamagata as Home Minister and Tsuyo Mishima as chief of the Metropolitan Police.

The Government policy of westernization was of course opposed by certain sections of the people and the press. Papers used the pen to disclose the immoral life of ladies in the aristocratic circles and believed that the westernization was degenerating the good manners of Japan. The Jiji Shimpō in its issue of April 22, 1898, sarcastically said, "dancing parties were jolly amusing and worthy of peaceful days."

In view of the situation, the Japanese people ought not to have spent nights in dancing and so on as if they were really enjoying peaceful days. Enraged at the foolish ways of improvement invented by

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genuses in the Government, political leaders of the Opposition held a reunion in Tokyo and tried to organize a bloc to steer the course of Japan the right way. The movement was joined by Shojiro Goto, Yukio Ozaki, now the champion for the limitation of armaments like Borah in the United States, Tetcho Suychiro, M. Oishi, now a retired statesman but still influential in the political world, and others. This was called "Daido Danketsu," or a grand bloc. They held a grand congress in Tokyo to declare its inauguration, at which various resolutions were adopted. The congress was attended by 341 from each district. The resolutions adopted included their demand for the decrease of the land tax, the liberty of speech and meetings and the abolition of the revision of the treaties

Regarding the revision of the treaties, there was opposition to the revision even among the Ministers for the reason that the change was still unfavourable to Japan. So, Minister Inouye of Foreign Affairs had to resign and the revision of the treaties was suspended. The political leaders of the Opposition further continued their attacks upon the Government. Thereupon

Premier Ito issued a new law relative to the maintenance of peace and order and by it he ordered all opposition leaders against the law out of the capital. This law was mercilessly enforced by Tsuyo Mishima, then chief of the Metropolitan Police. The law was promulgated on December 26, 1887, and was put in execution immediately. After this coup d'etat, the Government changed the press law on December 28 and relaxed its measures.

As a result of the peace and order law, not a few papers were greatly affected, many writers having been ordered to leave the capital. Among those ordered out of town were Yukio Ozaki, of the Choya Shimbun, To-oru Hoshi, of the Mezamashi Shimbun, Chomin Nakaye, of the Jiyu Shimbun. To-oru Hoshi was in later years the leader of Tammany Hall in the Tokyo Municipality and was assassinated by Sotaro Iba on June 21, 1901. Nakaye was one of the first scholars to study French thought. He died on December 12, 1901, after leaving a famous work, "One Year and a Half," which he began to write when he was told by his doctor that he would not live longer than one year and a half.