

CHAPTER XVII

FROM OKUMA TO TERAUCHI

The Japanese press went on increasing its power and influence. Due to the opposition of the press, the Kiyoura Cabinet did not materialize although he was ordered by the Emperor to organize one after the Yamamoto Ministry collapsed. Because of the full-hearted support of the press, the Okuma Cabinet secured overwhelming votes when, after its appearance in succession to the Yamamoto Cabinet, Premier Okuma dissolved the Diet in order to know how much confidence was placed by the people in his cabinet. Then almost all the papers in Tokyo and elsewhere gave the Cabinet unanimous support. They hated the Seiyukai which was controlling the political situation. The result of the general election was what the press desired. The Seiyukai could secure only 108 against their previous 205 seats, while the Government parties won 210, a majority in the House.

The Okuma Cabinet, however, was obliged to resign on account of its policy towards China which became the object of public censure. Count Okuma, later Marquis, was an idealist. He was carried away too far by his belief and ideals as to the future of Japan. Despite his principle that Japan and China ought to be friends, he had to go forward with a high-handed policy regarding the Chinese question, as the Chinese Government slighted Japan over the latter's demand for the conclusion of a treaty to insure the status quo of the South Manchuria Railway and other important points. Although the general belief was that China would take into con-

sideration that Japan fought a war in Manchuria for the sake of the peace of the Orient when Russia had designs in China, the Peking Government would not listen to Japan's demand for the prolongation of the lease of the South Manchuria Railway, which Japan had obtained from China, or rather from Russia, as a result of the Russo-Japanese War in which Japan lost millions in lives and money. China did not agree to the Japanese demand until the Okuma Government presented the famous 21 demands.

After the fall of the Okuma Cabinet, the Terauchi Ministry was organized in 1917. The new Cabinet was bureaucratic and militaristic. Terauchi himself was a general of the Army and had been the Governor-General of Chosen. His Cabinet was formed on a non-partisan basis and lacked party support. The result was a general unpopularity of the cabinet in journalistic circles and public antagonism against the cabinet soon grew.

An instruction given to local Governors by Baron Goto, now Viscount, asking them to censor the press more strictly, caused a conflict between the press and the Government. Newspaper Clubs presented a strong protest to the Government against the wording used by Baron Goto in his instructions to the effect that the local Governors would be requested to 'lead the press'.

The question was later settled by the efforts of a third person. Baron Goto, explained the phrase 'to lead the press,' used in his instructions to the local Governors, saying that he had no mind at all to injure the prestige of the press but still deem-

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ed it to be the duty of the authorities to guide the nation.

In August, 1918, what is called 'rice riots' happened in Osaka, Tokyo and many localities in Japan. The cause of the trouble was the high cost of living due to the soaring price of rice. The price of the cereal rose abnormally and caused sufferings to the poor class people, on account of the poor harvest, and manipulations by rice-dealers and brokers. Consequently a riot started in a lonely part of the country, Toyama Prefecture, not by labour union men but by the wives of fishermen who had no proletarian consciousness of course, and it spread to Osaka, Tokyo and elsewhere.

An order was issued by the Minister of Home Affairs, prohibiting the publication of any news concerning the riot lest it should have contagious effects upon the mind of the people. The fact was that newspaper publicity undoubtedly incited the people.

A movement was started by representative newspapers against the order. They regarded it as unprecedentedly unjust. They filed a strong protest with Dr. Mizuno, who succeeded Goto as Minister of Home Affairs, after the latter's transfer to the post of Foreign Minister. Minister Mizuno gave in at last and cancelled the Government order although exaggerations in any case should still be strictly prohibited.

A meeting of newspapermen was held at the Osaka Hotel on August 25, 1918, at which speeches were made by the undaunted champions of the fourth estate in inflammatory language, accusing the Government of its inactivity regarding the price readjustments.

The conflict between the Government and the press was consummated

in the pressure brought to bear by the Terauchi Cabinet upon the Osaka Asahi. The Government authorities picked on a few passages in the news reporting the meeting of newspapermen at the Osaka Hotel in the news columns of the Osaka Asahi, and called them a threat to the foundation of the empire. The passages in question were as follows but what was regarded as sedition is left blank.

"Those who sat at table were not made joyous by the taste of dishes or the flavour of wine. The Japanese Empire, which has been proud of its traditional faultlessness, is now on the brink of..... .., isn't it?.....', so said an ancient man and those present clearly saw a bad omen in their vision while moving knives and forks....."

The evening edition of the Osaka Asahi which printed this report was put under ban by the Government and the administration showed its determination to suspend the entire publication of the paper itself. What was done by the Government in the matter in the name of authority was the outcome of a petty sentimentalism. In reality, the Terauchi Cabinet was severely attacked by the Osaka Asahi and it was branded by the paper as a back-number in every respect. The Osaka Asahi, with Sosen Torii as the editor-in-chief, was progressive and radical and even revolutionary. The paper showed profound sympathy for the revolutions in Russia and China.

In an editorial on March 19 and 20, 1917, under the caption of 'The psychological basis of revolution', the Osaka Asahi said:

"Revolutions are always regarded as extraordinary events but such an observation is nonsensical. In

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truth, all revolutions are caused by the psychological wants of nations. They might be called necessary wants of animals. We wonder, however, at the fact that in Japan there are not a few who deny the above theory only for the weak reason that the Japanese Constitution was the gift of the emperor to his subjects. In this country, the ruling class is far behind the current tendency of thought. Not only so, but they try to avoid realizing it. They do not know that their idol is dying minute by minute. They are supporting what should not be supported. If a nation cannot fight this unreasonable state of things, it means that the nation does not exist as a real nation. A nation always sinks into such a hopeless condition before it declines in a clash with a foreign enemy. It is reported that the Romanov Court is still alive on its dying bed but if the court ceases

to exist, the Russian nation will be saved".

The Government showed no compromise and the Osaka Asahi was obliged to change its editors, dismissing Sosen Torii, Kanji Maruyama, Manjiro Hasegawa and Ikuo Oyama. Mr. Ryuhei Murayama, President, resigned and Mr. Riichi Uyeno became President. Meantime, the Terauchi Ministry collapsed and the Hara Cabinet appeared.

Sosen Torii, who resigned his position as editor-in-chief of the Osaka Asahi started a new paper named the Taisho Nichi-Nichi in Osaka but the paper did not live longer than two years. The fact shows that in Osaka any paper which may have the Asahi or the Osaka Mainichi as its rivals cannot exist. Torii was wrong in his policy in regarding as his enemy the Osaka Asahi which dismissed him under the pressure of the Government.