We Shall Overcome

"Let the little children come to me..."

In spite of a chorus of protest against Abe's security bills, the Abe government forced them through the upper house on Sept. 12. Then, in order to shore up his sagging approval ratings, he launched his "Three New Arrows" policy on Sept. 24. One of these "arrows" was that of support for child raising. It was part of a promise made to the National Federation of Private Kindergartens in a joint conference with his LDP party's education committee.

When compared to the irrational use of tax money on such things as military expansion and nuclear power, this is obviously far preferable. However, I have mixed feelings concerning the national government promulgating such a policy. The reason any government would pour money into childhood education is that children represent the future of any country and are therefore an integral part of its national interest. The OECD has reported that investing in childcare and childhood education has a very high return on investment in a nation's future. Thus, as part of its national strategy, the Japanese government wants to invest in the future through childhood education.

There is, however, a huge problem lurking in the background of such involvement by the government in childhood education, and that is that if children are viewed in such a utilitarian way, they will be selected according to their perceived potential return for the nation. Thus, children with learning disabilities will end up falling through the cracks.

As Jesus said, "Let the little children come to me, and do not hinder them, for the kingdom of God belongs to such as these." To Jesus, all children should be in God's Kingdom and accepted and loved as they are. It is my desire to take to heart Jesus' words and cherish these children just as they are in this age of government involvement in childhood education.

Rev. Sato Shigeyoshi, Koshien Church
A Critical Time For the Sayama Case

By Tamba Fumio

The Sayama Case refers to the crime that occurred in the city of Sayama on May 1, 1963, when a high school girl was kidnapped and later murdered. The police, who had let the culprit slip through their hands as he came to try to collect the ransom money, utilized the prevailing mood of the local people that "No ordinary person could have done such a dastardly act, and so it must have been one of those burakumin," thus concentrating their investigation on the local buraku community. After interrogating the young men of the buraku, they choose Ishikawa Kazuo and arrested him on May 23. Ishikawa has spent the last 52 years protesting his innocence.

Ishikawa is completely innocent, and so the Sayama Case is one in which an innocent person was made guilty based on buraku discrimination. This was the reason that the United Church of Christ in Japan took on this issue, together with other religious groups. The judicial system in Japan, consisting of the police, prosecutors and courts, is what made an innocent man into a murder convict and has failed to correct that injustice even after 52 years. I simply cannot accept this. The problems that infect the Japanese judicial system became so apparent in the Sayama Case.

In the third appeal for retrial that Ishikawa launched in 2006, the slow process of the 3 parties — namely the court, the prosecutors and the defense lawyers — began consultations in April 2009, and this past October 9, they held their 25th such meeting. The presiding judge, Kadono Hiroshi, has directed the prosecution to divulge the pieces of evidence in their possession, and so far, 185 such items have been produced. Unless what is considered "new evidence" is introduced, a retrial cannot take place. Thus, Ishikawa's lawyers have used these 185 pieces of evidence produced by the prosecution from their files on the case to produce such new evidence and have presented those to the court. This is where things stand at present.

Among the 36 items that were presented at the 3-way conference held in May 2010 was a "written report" that Ishikawa had been directed to write on the day of his arrest. The writing style of that paper is completely different from the writing of the real culprit in the ransom demand. The defense team had a writing expert analyze both documents, and this was then submitted as new evidence of Ishikawa's innocence. Likewise, there was a tape recording of Ishikawa's interrogation. From the recording, it is clear that Ishikawa could not even correctly write the Japanese "hiragana" characters and had to be coached by the interrogator. The writing of the "confession" is also recorded, which shows that Ishikawa was writing it as directed. An analysis of this tape by an expert was also presented to the court as powerful evidence of his innocence.

This past October 30, a "Citizen's Rally for a Retrial of the Sayama Case" was held at Hibiya Park in Tokyo with about 4000 people from around the country. In relation to this event, a group of 70 Christians held a pre-rally meeting...
CROWNED WITH THORNS

on that morning from 11 a.m. to noon in which they shared news of various ways the Kyodon is dealing with the issue of buraku discrimination in the respective districts around the country. The main rally, then, began at 1 pm.

At the rally, Ishikawa stood together with his wife Sachiko to thank the crowd, saying "We've at last seeing some light at the end of the tunnel, and so we ask you all to continue to support our struggle." A representative of the lawyers also gave a report about the tape recording and how important that would be in the case. After the rally, the participants joined in a 4 km procession to Tokiwasba Park, making appeals along the way for others to join in demanding a retrial.

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In June of this year, there was a change in the presiding judge, and so the prospects of a retrial being granted before the end of 2015 suffered a setback. Nevertheless, the long process appears to be coming to a head, as this 3-party consultation has gone about as far as it can go, and so it seems highly likely that a retrial decision will be made during 2016. This is clearly a critical time in the Sayama Case, and so we ask everyone to keep up the pressure by letting their voices be heard through sending requests for a retrial to the Tokyo High Court. I truly think that the time when we will get that retrial and be able to lift a toast to an exonerated Ishikawa is not far off.

Declaration of the Establishment of the National Levelers' Association: A "Memory of the World"

By Asaji Takeshi, Director of the Osaka Human Rights Museum

The establishment of the National Levelers' Association on March 3, 1922 was the start of the Buraku Liberation Movement in an organized fashion. This was an effort to take the lead in the movement to liberate the oppressed burakumin over and against the patronizing assimilationist movement of improving their lot that had been the focus up until that point. Those who attended that founding conference received a one-page printout with the mission statement and declaration printed on the front and the resolutions and rules printed on the back. This document was approved unanimously to the applause and cheers of all of the participants and thus became the first document of the National Levelers' Association. It is estimated that between 700 and 1000 copies were made, but of those, only three copies are known to still exist, two of them in the Yanagihara Bank Museum that is connected to the Sujin Self-Government Association (one of which is on loan to the Levelers' Association Museum operated by the Nara Human Rights Cultural Foundation in the city of Gose in Nara Prefecture) and one copy at the Ohara Institute of Social Research at Hosei University in Tokyo.

The general principles on the front side of the handout stated that they would fight against

Asaji Takeshi speaking at the Osaka Christian Center in November 2014
buraku discrimination by first of all referring to themselves as "tokushu burakumin" (literally, "special hamlet people"), which was a euphemistic label that had been used against them in a discriminatory way. The set of rules, which served as the bylaws, had as its 6th article that the principle that an organization calling itself a "levelers association" would have as its goal being an organization that would win respect. The three articles of the mission statement lifted up the importance of the humanity of the burakumin along with all other human beings. Hirano Shoken, who had been born in Fukushima and was then living in Tokyo, proposed the first two general principles. The first stated, "Tokushu Burakumin shall achieve complete liberation through our own actions," and was thus in the spirit of self-liberation. The second principle concerned economic social achievement and stated, "We, Tokushu Burakumin, are determined to achieve our demands for complete freedom in undertaking economic activities and in choosing our occupations." The third general principle, then, was proposed by Sakamoto Seichiro of Nara and stated, "We shall awaken to the fundamentals of human nature and march towards highest human perfection." These principles emphasized the importance of the humanity of all peoples and not just the burakumin. Likewise, the resolutions printed on the second page concerned the policies of action, and the important points there are still reflected in the buraku liberation movement today. Among those is the principle of "thorough censure" that is in the first article, which is also thought to have been proposed by Sakamoto and Hirano.

**Composition: The Final Planning Conference Lead by Saiko Mankichi and Hirano Shoken**

The first draft of the declaration that is so symbolic of the very concept of the National Levelers' Association was prepared by Saiko Mankichi, who had been born into a temple of the Jodo Shinshu (Pure Land) Honganji Buddhist Sect in Nara. From childhood, Saiko had been blessed with artistic talent in drawing and drama, and he was also well versed in both eastern and western thought. From February 1922, he devoted himself to drafting the declaration of the establishment of the National Levelers' Association. In his later years, however, he stated in the May 1967 issue of "Buraku" in an article titled "Concerning the Suiheisha Declaration," "Hirano did considerable editing of the wording" — something that was admitted for the first time publicly. He also said in all humility, "I think I need to apologize to everyone and particularly Mr. Hirano." Needless to say, "editing" means thinking deeply about the intended meaning of words and phrases and making adjustments to them. Hirano was involved with the labor movement in Tokyo from its beginnings and so was familiar with the various statements, etc. coming out of that and other grassroots movements. Thus, he was the perfect person to help craft the most appropriate wording of the declaration for the founding of this new social movement organization.

Thus, this combination of Saiko's artistic sense and Hirano's familiarity with social movements led to this almost complete draft of the declaration. Nevertheless, while it is certainly these two that played the central role, it was not as though they accomplished this in isolation, as that would be a denial of the communal character of this statement as a founding document of the National Levelers' Association. In fact, on the evening of February 28, just 3 days prior to the organizing convention, a group of eight organizers gathered in a second-floor room of the Miyamoto Inn across from Kyoto Station to work on the declaration, general principles, rules and resolutions to be presented at the organizing convention. In addition to Saiko, Hirano and Sakamoto, the members included Minami Umekichi and Sakurada Kikuzo of Kyoto, Komai Kisaku and Yoneda Tomi of Nara, and Kondo Hikaru, who had been born in Saitama but was by then located in Kyoto.

**Concepts: Humanism and the Burakumin Identity**

Beginning with "Tokushu Burakumin throughout the country: Unite!" and finishing with "Let there be warmth in human society, let there be light to all human beings," the conceptual core of the declaration is a
humanism symbolized by the phrase, "we now organize a new collective movement to emancipate ourselves by promoting respect for human dignity." In a declaration with less than 700 characters, the word "human" (which would be two characters in the Japanese) appears 10 times, as it focuses on human dignity, thus making it a declaration of humanity. One other conceptual core is found in the phrase, "The time has come when we can be proud of being Eta" (a highly derogatory term meaning literally "filth abundant"), which forms the basis for burakumin identity. This identity is closely connected to the cognizance of the historical role played by the burakumin as is expressed in the phrase, "Our ancestors pursued and practiced freedom and equality."

This declaration that so symbolizes the ideals of the National Levelers' Association was also deeply affected by such foreign personalities as Maxim Gorky, Romain Rolland and William Morris, who represented humanist thought that emphasized human dignity. Such intellects as these were at the forefront of the various strains of thought vying to open up a new chapter in human society and included such varied concepts as democracy and socialism based on universal values of freedom and equality, political thought including anarchy, movements to bring about ethnic self-determination, and religious ideals of love of neighbor expounded by Christianity and Buddhism. Thus, we can see in this declaration something that is truly significant for the world at large, as the essence of these various strains of thought have been condensed into these core concepts of humanism that permeate the declaration as they resonate with the aspirations of the burakumin people to be liberated from discrimination.

Even though we feel that this declaration has great significance for the world, it is nevertheless a product of its times, as can be seen its lack of gender recognition. Its use of phrases such as "brothers" and "manly martyrs of industry" show that it fails to see women as persons the declaration is trying to appeal to or as subjects who create history. Likewise, the document fails to touch upon the deep connection between the emperor system and buraku discrimination. This was perhaps in
deference to the severe oppression that the authorities could administer in that time when the state was so dominated by the emperor system, but it might also have simply been due to internal differences of opinion concerning the emperor system.

**Significance as the World's First Human Rights Declaration Composed by People who were the Subjects of Discrimination**

The General Principles and Declaration of the National Levelers' Association had quite an impact and effect both in Japan and around the world. Other groups of people who were similarly oppressed by discrimination within the context of the policies of the modern state of Japan, such as the Koreans in Japan, the Okinawans concentrated in Osaka, the Ainu indigenous people and people who had contracted and recovered from Hansen's Disease, were inspired towards their own movements of liberation. Likewise, on the Korean Peninsula, which was then a colony of Imperial Japan, the discriminated-against group known as "paek jeong" led a similar movement and founded the "Shoheisha" (Equality Association) in 1923, basing its founding documents on the National Levelers' Association, and forming an alliance with them. The National Levelers' Association, with its General Principles and Declaration, greatly encouraged discriminated-against peoples all over East Asia, and it played a central role in the movement of self-liberation from discrimination. Likewise, the General Principles and Declaration of the National Levelers' Association was widely reported on in newspapers and magazines in the West and in Russia.

This historical background shows that the General Principles and Declaration have worldwide significance and thus continue to have value to the entire world. For instance, the Buraku Liberation League, which is the descendant of the National Levelers' Association, led the way in founding an International Human Rights NGO called The International Movement Against All Forms of Discrimination and Racism (IMADR) in 1988. This was kind of a "Worldwide Levelers' Association" that formed alliances with various
groups around the world facing discrimination, such as blacks in America and South Africa, Dalits in India and the Sinti-Roma in Europe, to facilitate international efforts to combat discrimination and human rights abuse around the world.

Perhaps more than anything else, it is the fact that the Founding Declaration of the National Levelers' Association was the world's first human rights declaration developed by a discriminate-against group shows its worldwide significance. It is with this in mind that together with the support of many other organizations, such as the Nara Human Rights Cultural Foundation and the Sujin Self-Government Association, the Buraku Liberation League is leading the way to have the Founding Declaration of the National Levelers' Association and its related documents registered as an UNESCO "Memory of the World." These documents are on par with the "Declaration of the Rights of Man and of the Citizen" of the French Revolution and thus deserve being registered as an UNESCO Memory of the World.

Reflections on Presentation at Conference in Germany
By Mizuno Matsuo

At the recent conference in Germany (September 25-27, 2015, sponsored by the Evangelical Mission in Solidarity with the title, "Against Discrimination Worldwide in Church and Society: Buraku, Dalit, Sinti and Roma United Against Marginalization"), I gave a report that included the following three points: 1) the reasons behind buraku discrimination; 2) the realities of buraku discrimination; and 3) the steps being taken to eliminate buraku discrimination. In this article, I want to expound on the first two of those points.

As I have been involved with the Dalit movement in India for some 30 years, I was able to renew friendships with people I know who were in attendance. In addition to that, I had the privilege of interacting with the Sinti-Roma people of Germany and meeting the people of EMS, who set up the conference. Likewise, I had my interest renewed in a topic I want to delve into further myself — that of meat processing and leather making, which I got to see in Ulm Germany through the efforts of Andreas Hoffmann-Richter (who was formerly a missionary in Japan). One common issue faced by both the Japanese and German churches is the aging of congregations. As the representatives of the churches of India, Japan and Germany fellowshipped with each other and the local discriminated-against community, I was encouraged by the active participation of the younger generation.

I have been a full-time staff member of the Tokyo Federation of the Buraku Liberation League since 1990, where I'm in charge of such things as producing the newsletters and setting up seminars, and in recent years, I've focused on employment strategies for my fellow burakumin while working at the overall goal of eliminating buraku discrimination.

During the Edo Era (1603-1867), the manufacture of leather to be used in military gear and for horse saddles, etc. was of critical importance to the government. The people involved in the leather industry were artisans who worked with pride just as they do today. As part of their control policies, the Edo government instituted in 1635 a system of social control involving the establishment of communities of "chori" (or "eta," who became
the burakumin of later eras) and "hinin" (literally "non-persons") who were to be under the control of a leader referred to as "Danzaemon." These communities were forced to do jobs considered defiling, including those involved with maintaining social control through the penal system, such as preparing for and cleaning up after executions, acting as jailers, etc.

This system came to an end with the ending of the feudal system, but in the more than 140 years since, the strict institutional discrimination of the feudal era morphed into the buraku discrimination of more modern times, passing itself down through the generations as marriage and employment discrimination, unfair land dealings, and other such forms of discrimination.

While we in the liberation movement have been endeavoring to eliminate the effects of discrimination experienced in buraku communities through improvements in employment, education and the environment, one issue that needs to be addressed in the area of education and societal enlightenment is that of the reasons behind such discrimination. Thus, we need to increase people's awareness of the issues involved.

During the Edo Era, horses and cows that could no longer serve their purpose on the farm were taken to a designated site at the border of the buraku community. The animals were then slaughtered at a selected site on a riverbank and skinned. Those skins were then processed into leather. These people were also pressed into service to take care of the bodies of those who had been executed by the authorities.

When people outside those communities witnessed such thing, their gut reaction was revulsion against those involved, and it is this that is the basis for buraku discrimination. American psychiatrist Aaron Beck is known for developing what's called "cognitive therapy," and he called this "automatic thoughts." It is what comes to one's mind immediately when witnessing something. It is a form of awareness that everyone experiences. We naturally react with negative feelings when, for instance, we see a dead cat that's been run over lying in the road. It is this kind of distorted awareness that leads to the feelings and actions of discrimination. On the other side, positive thinking, such as "all humans are equal," tends to have rather weak staying power, and so it's important that such distorted awareness be replaced by an awareness that is in line with reality. I myself have been speaking on behalf of this effort at the Committee on Buraku Discrimination of the National Council of Churches and have also been dealing with the issue through setting up field trips to the Shibaura Slaughter House and the Meat Information Center three times a year, where we study the history of the Tokyo buraku community, the present situation of buraku discrimination and the place of the meat industry within the society at large, all with the correction of this distorted awareness in mind.

Buraku Discrimination Is Influenced by the Spirit of the Age and Societal Situation

The Edo Feudal Government came to an end in 1867 with the founding of the Meiji Government. In 1871, the government did away with the former systems of the Edo Era in order to establish a free-market economy. The buraku communities lost their monopoly over the hides of cows and horses and the role they alone had had as leather producers. This resulted in many small operations not being able to continue. However, there were a few larger operations around the country that had saved up capital to work with, and so they continued in the industry. This, of course, included the "Danzaemon" in Tokyo, who had been the official leather maker for the Edo feudal government, and so he set up both his own leather factory and a shoe factory, which together became the foundation for the leather
making and shoe manufacture industry in present-day Japan.

In 1872, the newly instituted educational system required that all children attend elementary school. This resulted in children from the buraku communities supposedly having to go to school with children from outside the community. The parents of non-buraku children, however, did not want their children to go to school together with buraku children, and so for 7 years, you had the situation where such parents prevented buraku children from attending school. This happened in several buraku communities in the Tokyo area, where buraku children simply couldn’t go to school.

Every year I travel to the Indian state of Tamil Nadu, where recently there was an incident in which 2000 people of the Shudras caste attacked 3 Dalit villages in protest over a marriage between a Dalit and a Shudra. There was a similar incident in Japan 140 years ago. Another such example occurred in 1925, when in the town of Serada, some 80 km outside of Tokyo, 16 buraku houses were attacked by some 2000 people. The persecutors initially promised to offer an apology, but they reneged on their promise and continued to discriminate.

In present-day Japan, there are still incidents in which buraku people are driven to suicide due to discrimination, but there are no longer any such incidents of lynching or arson by groups of people. Nevertheless, more than 140 years after the beginning of Meiji, there is still discrimination through background checks that result in being refused employment, along with land-purchase and marriage discrimination.

In 1993, my own family experienced such employment discrimination. It involved a part-time job, but the personnel manager stated, "We don’t want to include a buraku person in the human relations of our company." I went in to talk with the company officials, and as a result, they came to realize the issue of buraku discrimination. They then instituted a new position in charge of human rights and began a program of human rights education.

With the agricultural reforms that followed WWII, the buraku people who had been sharecroppers became independent farmers. During the 19 years from December 1954 through November 1973, the Japanese economy maintained an annual growth rate of over 10%. During this period of rapid growth, the Buraku Liberation League petitioned the government to institute a national policy to solve the buraku problem. In 1965, the task force set up by the government to look into the issue released a report stating, "The buraku issue is one that the government has a responsibility to solve and is also one that all Japanese citizens need to deal with." This resulted in legislation being passed in 1969 that was designed to improve the infrastructure of buraku areas and assist members of the buraku communities in employment and education. These measures, however, were repealed in 2002 (as being no longer necessary). There was, however, no effort made to measure the results of the 33 years the program was in existence, and the approximately 1000 buraku communities in which this program had not been implemented were left on their own. In the background of the ending of this program were events in Japanese society that negatively impacted the economic situation, including the bursting of the bubble in 1991 and the progressive worsening of the economy, and so whether there had been a change in the situation of buraku discrimination was simply left out of the equation.

During the economic doldrums the Japanese economy has been in, the gap between the rich and poor in society has become increasingly wide. Some 40% of laborers are in temporary or part-time positions, and the number who have an annual income below 2 million yen (about $16,700) now exceeds 10 million. One in six children live in poverty, and 70% of single-mother households live below the poverty line. Within this situation of single-parent homes and economic hardships, the number of incidents of child abuse now exceeds 70,000 per year.

In the midst of this social stress and poverty, and also due to the proliferation of the internet as we entered the 21st Century, buraku discrimination took on a new form. For instance, a 34-year-old man from Tokyo,
who was in an unstable employment situation, decided to find an outlet for his stress by anonymously sending out some 400 inflammatory postcards during an 18-month period to various burakumin around the country. He wrote extremely derogatory things about burakumin such things as, "They (using a condescending form) look like human beings but they aren't human beings. They work at slaughterhouses killing pigs or in the leather industry, which are vile occupations. They are cold-blooded life forms that do cruel things like spending their days heartlessly killing pigs and cows at slaughterhouses. They have formed violent criminal gangs even more frightening than the gangster organization known as the Buraku Liberation League." He also sent notes to people living close to his intended burakumin targets encouraging discrimination against them by saying, "You are living in close proximity to some very dangerous people." The police finally caught the culprit, and he received a 2-year prison sentence for forgery, intimidation and defamation of character.

There have also been internet sites that post lists of the addresses of buraku areas and names of people. This has the effect of promoting discrimination by making this information easily and widely available to those who use such information to discriminate against burakumin people. Likewise, there have been incidents of discriminatory graffiti and hate speech by rightwing groups.

In order to resolve these issues, in addition to improving the economy and the employment situation, there also need to be improvements made in education to eliminate buraku discrimination and legislation passed to both bring relief to the victims of such discrimination and to strengthen laws against unjust discrimination.

When it comes to how the buraku are described in Japanese textbooks, there are many remaining issues. In a middle school textbook, for instance, the explanation of the buraku areas in Japan and the people that live there is basically that they are lower class people who have been discriminated against and that they "must be treated equally."

However, without more information than that, our children still end up becoming targets of discrimination and bullying.

I really want the important role that those involved in the leather industry played both in the past and in the present in our society to be taught in schools. During the Edo Period, the contributions of the people involved in the leather industry was not simply limited to the leather itself, which was so important to the governing powers. They also provided meat and medications made from animal organs that contributed to the health of ordinary people. They made products ranging from glue to ink and ink stones and brushes made of horsehair. These products enabled Japanese history and culture (and indeed that of the whole world) to be passed on to succeeding generations. Pigments mixed with collagen glue resulted in the paints that allowed traditional Japanese art to develop. Animal lard was made into wax for candles, thus providing a source of light at night.

Needless to say, in modern society as well, meat and leather products are an integral part of our food and clothing culture and enrich our daily lives. Collagen, in the form of glues and gelatin, is used in cosmetics, adhesives in various industries, and recently, as the base on which IPS stem cells can be grown for medical purposes — something that will contribute to the renewal of our bodies, organs and nerves.

These things are something that people who shy away from even thinking about a slaughterhouse simply don't understand. We must help them realize that people shouldn't focus on feelings of revulsion at the thought of such a place but on the many products that come out of that industry that are so important for our daily lives. Thus, education is a key to ridding society of discrimination.

During the Edo Period, people working in the leather industry worked with pride, and through their work, our society and culture developed. Their techniques and experience has further developed in modern society. Thus, their social significance and roles must be taught in our educational institutions. There are not that many of our buraku people who are still working in the leather and meat industry, but in Tokyo, there are several
buraku districts that still have a leather industry. In this situation, we need to instill within our children a positive sense of pride in the work of their ancestors and the roles they played. This is an important educational issue in our society — namely to correct false understandings and instill a positive image of the work of slaughterhouses.

A Treasure Worth Sharing
Rob Witmer

During our Home Assignment in Canada from August 2104 to August 2015, I was honoured to be given the task of being supervisory editor of the English edition of Buraku Liberation: Let Light Shine on All of Humanity. This is an amazing book that contains information not only about the Buraku people of Japan and the discrimination that they continue to experience, but also about other groups that experience discrimination in Japan such as the Ainu, Zainichi Koreans and the people of Okinawa. In addition, there are articles about groups in other countries such as the Comfort Women, the Dalit of India, and the Sinti and Roma people of Germany with whom the Buraku Liberation Center has built relationships of solidarity in recent years.

However, I must admit that I found my task slightly more difficult than I had initially expected. The contents of this book include sermons, addresses and articles by no fewer than 26 different people, and the English translation itself was also carried out by several people. I found it a difficult task to try and bring a sense of unity and consistency to
the content, having no opportunity to consult either the translators or the original writers directly. Tanimoto Miki, who works at the Buraku Liberation Center, and the members of the Editorial Committee were my constant source of support, providing prompt and helpful responses to my every question, and I thank them from my heart for their cooperation and guidance. The final editing process took place from the end of January through to mid-May, a time when we were in the midst of our travels throughout Canada, and it was unfortunate that I had no one who could do a final proof reading of the text. Reading through the book, as published, let me be the first to admit that there are several places where minor changes should probably be made. Fortunately, I believe they do not affect the overall message that this book seeks to convey. I believe it is a very powerful book, and I hope that its rich content will, as written in the Foreword, “scold, heal, and encourage” all those who may read it.

I have sent many copies of the English edition to friends in different parts of the world and have been pleased to receive comments from some of the people who have had a chance to read it. Some were surprised to learn of the continued presence of discrimination directed toward Buraku people — both within the church as well as among other religions in Japan — and expressed a strong desire to someday visit the Buraku Liberation Centre to learn more about its work. Others were similarly surprised to learn of continuing discrimination but also felt a strong desire among those experiencing discrimination to find acceptance and inclusiveness in society. Friends in Canada who have worked with indigenous people and have also been active in Palestine wrote, “We were very impressed with the candidness and power of the articles we read. We both felt the situation, attitudes, and struggles to move towards respect for the dignity and human rights of all people had many parallels with the situations of the indigenous people of Canada and the Palestinian people living in the Occupied Palestinian Territories.” Yet another person wrote, “I can say that I am glad to have been made aware of the Buraku situation. Yet another part of humanity that is struggling to be recognized as valuable. Intelligent stories of hope and vision were what I saw and remember. I hope this book can be read far and wide for its wisdom and the message that it brings.”
What more can I say? This is a book that provides information about minorities in Japan that experience discrimination that is rarely available in English. It is a treasure to be shared by all those anywhere in the world who are seeking a world where the dignity, value, and rights of all people are recognized and respected. I thank all those who had the vision of making this book a reality and who worked to make it happen.

Buraku Liberation Center Activities Report for 2015

Kobayashi Akira

Our Buraku Liberation Center Activities continued normally in 2015, but I do want to highlight a few events and programs. The ongoing campaign to demand a retrial of the infamous "Sayama Case" continues. On Jan. 22, 2015, a list of 279 pieces of evidence was finally made public, but in June, a new presiding judge was assigned to the case. (See article on page 2.)

Every year, on the second Sunday of July, the BLC calls on all churches in the Kyodan to hold a "Day of Prayer for Buraku Liberation" and provides materials for that event. This year, we also led the worship service in a local church, traveling to the Nishinomiya Monto Church in the neighboring Hyogo District.

Rob Witmer, a United Church of Canada missionary serving in Hokkaido, came to give a presentation on the English version of the Buraku Liberation Sermon Series, *Buraku Liberation: Let Light Shine on All of Humanity*, which he had served as editor of. This seminar was held on August 2 at the Omi Heian Church in the Kyoto District to commemorate the publishing of this book, with 25 in attendance. (See article beginning on page 10.)

Another annual event is our Buraku Liberation Youth Seminar. This year was our 18th, and it was held at the Takaiishi Church in the Osaka District from August 18 to 21, with a total of 32 participants. The program included the showing of the movie, the title of which translates into English as "The Story of a Certain Meat Market," and talks by the producer Hanabusa Aya and Kitade Shinji, who played a role in the movie. We also to a field trip to the Kaizuka area, where the story took place. The BLC was also blessed to have seminary student Itani Jun, of the Rural Evangelism Seminary, work as an intern from August 3 to September 1.

The BLC was also able to send 2 participants, Torii Junpei and Mizuno Matsuo, to the "Against Discrimination World Wide in Church and Society: Buraku, Dalit, Sinti and Roma United Against Marginalization" conference held in Germany at the Evangelical Academy in Bad Boll from September 25 to 27, 2015. (See article beginning on page 6.)

Finally, there was our "Buraku Liberation Okinawa Caravan 2015" that was held on the islands of Okinawa, Ishigaki and Miyako from October 13 to 22. The BLC sent Higashitani Makoto, Arizumi Wataru and Goto Kei on the trip, with others pitching in to help along the way. The caravan members gave presentations at 15 locations, with cooperation from Kyodan churches in the Okinawa District, together with Catholic, Anglican and Baptist churches and even the Shinsu Otani Sect of Buddhism, to present the program "Ridding Society of Buraku Discrimination and All Other Forms of Discrimination."

Crowned With Thorns Editorial Committee

BLC Director Kobayashi Akira, BLC management committee chairperson Higashitani Makoto, Missionary Tim Boyle, Rev. Sato Shigeyoshi, Rev. Oguri Ken.

We appreciate your comments and suggestions concerning this newsletter and how to make improvements. Donations in either Japanese yen or US dollars are greatly appreciated and can be made by personal check.