We Shall Overcome

During this calamitous time brought on by the horrific damage wrought by the great earthquake and the resulting nuclear accident, we have received great strength and encouragement from the heartfelt prayers and numerous messages of support from around the world. These show us that we are not alone and that we live in this world together in solidarity.

Though distance separates our various churches, we share in common the Lord's Table. That table is a symbol of reconciliation and of all the world's people living together, is it not? Likewise, as we fellowship around that table in prayer, how great a strength is born within our hearts! Nevertheless, in today's Kyoden, the Lord's Table seems to have become a means of division and exclusion, and that saddens me greatly.

There were instances in the past where certain Japanese Christians refused to take communion from one cup together with people of buraku descent. I don't know whether that is directly connected or not, but in almost all Kyoden churches today, communion is served in individual cups rather than a common cup. This, then, brings to mind the question as to with whom and how are we to live together. It is my prayer and hope that one day, the Japanese church will drink from one cup and eat from one loaf together in joy as they we hold hands in prayer. It will take a long time for the disaster areas and Japan as a whole to recover. It is God's help and the prayers of people around the world that will give us the strength to accomplish this difficult task.
Forty Eight Years Since Sayama and the Hundredth Anniversary of the “High Treason Incident” Ishikawa Kazuo is Innocent

by Koyanagi Nobuaki

This past January was the 100th anniversary of the “High Treason Incident,” for which 12 persons were executed. This would at first glance seem to have no relevance to the kidnapping and murder of a high school girl 48 years ago, known as the “Sayama Incident,” but in reality there are some important parallels between the two.

The “High Treason Incident” occurred in May of 1910, when 26 anarchists led by Kotoku Shusui were arrested and charged with planning to assassinate the Emperor Meiji. The court system then was a bit different than it is today, but the trial was carried out in a special court in the equivalent in that day of the Supreme Court. It lasted less than a month, with the decision being handed down on January 18, 1911. Of the 26 defendants, 24 were given the death sentence, including Kotoku Shusui, Kanno Sugako, Miyashita Takichi and Oishi Seinosuke, who were considered the leaders, with the other 2 getting prison sentences. Of those sentenced to death, 12 were given a kind of pardon by Emperor Meiji to have their death sentences commuted to life imprisonment, but the others were executed, beginning with Kotoku and 10 others on Jan. 24th and ending with Kanno on the 25th.

Not one witness was presented at the trial, which was held behind closed doors, and so it was truly a “trial in the dark.” Hiranuma Kiichiro was in charge of prosecuting the trial, and as the result of the praise he received, he was promoted to Minister of Justice, and then in 1939, he became Prime Minister. After the war, he was prosecuted and convicted as a Class A war criminal.

In 1963, one of the defendants, Sakamoto Seima, petitioned for a retrial, but that was denied in Dec. 1965, and then his appeal of that decision was likewise denied on July 3, 1967. One thing that became clear after the war was that while four defendants, including Miyashita Takichi, were likely involved in an assassination conspiracy, it appears unlikely that Kotoku Shusui and 21 others were even involved at all.

So, as we look back on this “High Treason Incident,” we can see some remarkable similarity to Ishikawa Kazuo and the Sayama Incident — most notably the oppression of the court system, as is represented in Hiranuma Kiichiro. It would seem that in the eyes of the court, there is no relationship between protecting the State and protecting the lives of its people.

Ishikawa Kazuo was arrested on trumped up charges as the suspect in the Sayama Incident on May 23, 1963, and for the past 47 years, he has continued to proclaim his innocence.

Shortly prior to this, there was a separate crime that occurred and that served as the backdrop for Sayama. Known as the “Yoshinobu kidnapping and murder incident,” this crime occurred on March 31, but the police were not able to find and arrest the culprit. Thus, in order to make amendments for their own bungling of that case, the police chief called for his forces to make sure they got a “live culprit” for the Sayama case. As a result, the police decided to focus their efforts on the people of the discriminated-against buraku in Sayama. They first arrested Ishikawa on an unrelated charge on May 23, 1963, and for almost a month, they interrogated Ishikawa, who denied any involvement. Then, upon “releasing” him on June 17, they immediately rearrested him as the murder suspect. Continuing their draconian interrogation, they finally got him to sign a “confession” on July 9, and then indicted him for murder.

One of the major factors in this saga was that because Ishikawa Kazuo was born into a
family in the discriminated-against buraku, he was very poor and had little opportunity to receive even a basic education. In regards to this, I want to introduce two specific points, namely his lack of knowledge and his illiteracy.

When he was arrested, Ishikawa was not even able to clearly understand whether it was the police or his lawyer that was on his side. He ended up believing the words of a policeman he had played empty-lot baseball with, while rejecting the words of the lawyer. He didn't doubt the promise of the police that if he would agree to the confession, even if the death penalty were pronounced, he would be released after 10 years. He had been told by the investigators that his brother was involved and that since his brother's arrest would mean that his family would have no income at all (since his brother was the only one with a job), his family would suffer. Thus, through such skillful manipulation, the police convinced Ishikawa to "take the fall." So, believing what the police had said, he agreed to plead guilty at his trial (which ran from Sept. 4, 1963 to March 11, 1964), and so even when the death sentence was read, he still thought he would be okay. The police and prosecutors took advantage of Ishikawa's ignorance, and so he easily fell into their trap.

He finally realized that the police's promise was a lie while he was in the Tokyo detention facility and his case was on appeal. His fellow inmates told him that the death penalty is just that, and that the "ten years" was a lie. So, it was when Ishikawa realized that he had been tricked that his struggle began. It officially began with his appeal of innocence at the first hearing at the Tokyo High Court on Sept. 9, 1964.

The person who worked in the background to support Ishikawa's appeal was actually a prison guard at the detention center. He made great efforts to teach Ishikawa how to read and write in order to be able to protest his innocence to society. Ishikawa had only sporadically attended elementary school as a child, and his writing ability was so low that he couldn't even write his name properly. The last character in his name Kazuo is a difficult character, but because his name could also be written with a much simpler character, he used that one instead. (Ed. note: The same Japanese name when rendered in the English alphabet can often be written with a variety of character combinations.) In fact, that is the name he signed when he was asked to copy the original ransom letter that had been delivered to the house of the girl who was kidnapped and killed. It doesn't take an expert to see that they are clearly very different. In fact, Ishikawa simply did not have the skills then to even be able to write a ransom note like that, which would only be possible for someone with considerable education.

Nevertheless, the High Court refused to even direct the prosecution to open up to examination the numerous pieces of evidence they were hiding from the defense, and thus Ishikawa's testimony was ignored and he was sentenced to life imprisonment. Likewise, his further appeals for a retrial were also rebuffed.

The police, the prosecutors and the courts have continued to maintain their conclusion, which was based on the premise of protecting the authority of the state. Hiding under the surface, one can see arrogance of the power of the state, as it implied that it saved Ishikawa's life by commuting the original sentence from death to life imprisonment. Their actions in Ishikawa's case for these past 47 years are the same as those taken in Sakamoto Seima's postwar appeal for a retrial in the "High Treason Incident." Only if they finally grant Ishikawa the retrial he seeks, will the story end differently.

There are, fortunately, signs of hope, as the prosecution has finally and reluctantly produced some of the evidence it has held all these years. Primary among these are some things Ishikawa was forced to write down after his arrest, which are clearly very different from the writing in the original ransom note he supposedly had written. The testimony of a writing expert isn't even necessary to conclude that the writer of the ransom note could not have been Ishikawa, as anybody can clearly see that. So, even just this one piece of evidence is sufficient to prove that Ishikawa is innocent.

In considering what the rationale was for the prosecution to knowingly hide this conclusive evidence for 47 years, for the police to
fabricate a false confession, and for the court to sentence Ishikawa to death and then to life imprisonment, and for him to spend 32 years in prison, one is brought back to the “High Treason Incident” of 100 years ago.

The High Treason Incident and the Sayama Incident are both “crimes of authority” born out of the same mold, even though one was under the Meiji Imperial Constitution and the other under the present constitution. One used the oppression of socialists to bolster the emperor system while the other was rooted in the prejudicial attitudes of society against buraku people, but they both were unforgivable crimes perpetrated by the police, public prosecutors and the courts to bolster the prestige of the state.

If the Japanese Court is truly going to uphold Article 32 of the Japanese Constitution, which is the right to trial, they simply must recognize the directive given to the Japan government in 1998 by the United Nations based upon the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, which stated that the prosecution must present the evidence it holds to the defense for examination. This is the quickest way for Ishikawa Kazuo to get his day in court. It is the first step in getting the retrial he has been denied all these years.

One Pastor’s View of the Relationship Between the 100th Anniversary of the Forced Annexation of Korea and the United Church of Christ in Japan

Rev. Hideo Taleyama, Osaka Awaji Church

I have to admit that I was a bit daunted by the prospect of writing about this serious issue, but I gather that I was asked because I was the chairperson of the Task Force on Japanese-Korean and Koreans in Japan Solidarity, an entity created by the United Church of Christ in Japan (Kyodan) that no longer exists. It has been a while since the task force was dissolved due to “structural reforms,” but the issues it dealt with are still with us. I can’t help but feel that the Kyodan has become a distant existence, and so it is with such emotion that I endeavor to write the following observations.

When I did an internet search for “The 100th Anniversary of the Forced Annexation of Korea and the United Church of Christ in Japan,” I was directed to the Sept. 15, 2010 issue of the Kyodan Shinpo, where the article “A Message of Peace” appeared. (Ed. note: The English translation of this article appeared in the December 2010 issue of the Kyodan Newsletter.) This statement was jointly issued by the Korean Christian Church in Japan (KCCJ) and the Kyodan, and while I won’t quote directly from the article, there was something that really bothered me about it. The section titles read, “100th Anniversary of the Annexation of Korea,” “60th Anniversary of the Korean War,” and “The Issues of the Immigration Law and Fingerprinting,” and then it quotes from Ephesians before concluding with a list of several things that need to be uplifted in prayer and a statement that this is the calling that we have been given. In all of this, there is only one sentence in which the Kyodan is the subject of the sentence, and that is in the conclusion. It’s a statement about the Kyodan and KCCJ standing together, but in all the discussion about the history from the time of the annexation of Korea, it’s as though the Kyodan wasn’t involved in it at all. It concludes with “our calling as Christians,” but what is this calling if it is not in the context of history? Is the Kyodan merely observing
things from the standpoint of one who is unconnected to the history of Japanese imperial aggression? That's not at all the case! The Kyodan and its predecessor denominations were deeply entwined with Japanese imperialism, even lending it support. In fact, it was in deep repentance of that reality that the "Confession of War Responsibility" was drafted in 1967 under the name of the moderator at that time, Masahisa Suzuki. However, none of this was even referred to in the "Message of Peace."

While I do feel that there were some problems in that war responsibility confession itself, it was a recognition that the Kyodan needed to express deep repentance for its active support of the war effort and its turning a blind eye towards the atrocities perpetrated by the Japanese military against Korea and other Asian nations. (The Kyodan even called itself an "arm of the emperor" and sent out notices to all its churches about being a "locus" of prayer in praying for victory.) So, with this confession, the Kyodan was facing up to the reality of its past and providing a foundation for the future, but my problem with the "Message of Peace" is that it did not even refer to this at all. Likewise, I have a related issue with the KCCJ. In the symposium held last July commemorating the 100th Anniversary of the Annexation of Korea, in the keynote address, as the ongoing ramifications of the annexation were being referred to, the Kyodan Confession of War Responsibility and the phrase, "confessing a faith that itself is a confession of war responsibility before the Lord God" were given high marks. I understand this to be original position of the KCCJ, and so was there no effort on the part of KCCJ to have this referenced in this "Message of Peace?" I can't help but wonder what was going on behind the scenes and whether there was some reason why the KCCJ felt it had to kowtow to the Kyodan or something.

As I was reading through the document, "A Message of Peace," I reflected on the contrast of that with the booklet the Task Force on Japanese-Korean and Koreans in Japan Solidarity that I mentioned above put out in 2002. It was titled "Our Responsibility—Opening Up The Future." It includes the article "Korea and Us," written by Rev. Yoshiaki Kawamoto, who is presently the pastor at the Kokura Hiagari church in Kyushu. (There is also another very interesting article by Rev. Seinosuke Oshio entitled "Issues of the Kyodan from the standpoint of the Confession of War Responsibility" that portrays the very situation we have in the present Kyodan.) The article "Korea and Us" details the history of how Japan invaded its neighbor Korea, beginning with the Kokado Incident and all that led up to the forced annexation in 1910. (Ed. note: Kokado is the Japanese reading of this island’s name, which in Korean is Ganghwa Island. Located at the mouth of the Han River west of Seoul, it was the site of an 1875 invasion by Japanese to force the insular country to open up to the outside. First the French in 1866 and the Americans in 1871 had similarly tried to force Korea to open up, just as the US had done to Japan itself to end its self-imposed isolation a few years earlier.)

It was hoped that this information would be used in study groups to understand this process, something that should not be forgotten by the Japanese. The point I want to stress is that in order to understand the Japan of the 1940's, one has to backtrack 30 or 40 years and view the process of the invasion of our neighbor. It is to hold before

The Landing of the Japanese Marines at Kokado (Ganghwa Island) in 1875.
your eyes "the image of a ball dropped on a steep slope that can only roll down the hill, the image of wartime Japan."

Seeing how various incidents tie in historically is critical in seeing the big picture of imperial Japan, from the backing down of the Yokohama Kaigan Church in 1872 from including in its initial confession of faith an article denying the emperor system to Article 7 of the Kyodan bylaws of 1941 that stated its members were to "honor and support the imperial troops as you follow the imperial way and practice your faith." Likewise, we need to see how local churches and denominations then were supporting the military as it invaded and committed atrocities. Rev. Kawamoto tells of checking back in the

records of the church he served to see just how committed they were to the war effort, and he urged others to do likewise. Take a look at what it was that the churches and denominations prayed for and emphasized during those years immediately before the 1910 annexation, when the Japanese military violently suppressed the widespread resistance in Korea.

This year marks the 70th anniversary of the formation of the Kyodan in 1941, and so it is an appropriate time to look back at our history and its relationship to the emperor system. "Korea and Us" is an attempt to look back at that history and speak of the things that we must not forget.

BLC Director, Akira Kobayashi

First of all, I want to express our appreciation to all of you who support the Buraku Liberation Center through your prayers. With your support, we were able to accomplish all of the planned activities for the 2010 fiscal year. I am thankful for the opportunity to describe the BLC activities to our international supporters through this English newsletter.

During the 4 months this report covers, our main new event to report on was the presentation of our new Liberation Play, "Who Is Your Neighbor?", at the 2010 General Assembly of the Kyodan. The general storyline and background will be presented in another article in this issue by the playwright and director, Jo Kawakami.

This play was the 9th Liberation Play the BLC has produced, but this time we faced a complicated situation at our premier showing at the General Assembly, as a fierce debate was expected. We were questioned as to the appropriateness of taking valuable time from the schedule of those who had gathered from around the country to deliberate very weighty matters, especially since one of the main points of contention was the Buraku Liberation Center itself. Even our supporters were asking how appropriate it was for the BLC, which endeavors to work for the human rights of each individual, to present a play on buraku discrimination when the serious issue of the ministerial credentials of Rev. Jiro Kitamura being revoked was being debated.

After the performance was over, people filled out a questionnaire, and some responded that the play reflected the Kitamura situation. But it was in this kind of atmosphere in which the staff and performers practiced their parts, prepared publicity and made other preparations during the month or so prior to the General Assembly. Shortly before the performance, BLC activities committee chairperson Makoto Higashitani spent about 30 minutes with everybody involved discussing the issue, saying, "This is the situation the assembly is in now. If we go through with performing the play, there may be criticisms and complaints." He then asked each participant what they thought should be done. Each expressed their opinions, and the consensus was that "if we are going to be criticized whether we go on with the play or not, we'd rather everyone see the play and base their criticism on that." About 150 people watched the play, and of those, 84
returned the questionnaire. The warm applause that we received at the end of the play was truly heartwarming.

The playwright, Jo Kawakami, also portrayed another administrative council member of the church, Yoichi Higuchi, pastor of the Kumeda Church, Masataka Yamaguchi, a student at the Rural Evangelism Seminary, and another student, Seitaro Kitamura, all of who played their roles well.

While the next performances of this play are yet to be determined, the plan is to do performances in Osaka and Kyoto this coming August.

The most important event upcoming this year at the BLC is the “2011 Kanto District Buraku Liberation Caravan,” which is scheduled from June 25 to July 5. The caravan will visit all 5 prefectures of the district, Niigata, Gunma, Tochigi, Ibaraki and Saitama, where we’ll have a variety of events and field trips.

Performing the Liberation Play, “Who is Your Neighbor?”
Jo Kawakami, lay member of the Kinrin Church in Kyoto

A new Liberation Play is produced by the Buraku Liberation Center every other year, and this marks the ninth production. Each play is based on an actual incident of discrimination, and it seeks to portray how such discrimination occurs, how it scars those who are victimized, and how others react to the situation. Each new production is first performed at the General Assembly and then in numerous venues, particularly in the Kyoto, Osaka area, and each production has been well received.

I became involved in the plays from the 2nd production, and since the 4th production, I began playing the role of the pastor. I have written the scripts for and directed the last 3 productions. In this new play, however, my role was not that of the pastor, but of an administrative board member. As is obvious from the title, this play uses the parable of the “Good Samaritan” in Luke 10 as its base.

The main character, Mr. Kobayashi, was originally from a discriminated-against buraku, but he has hid that fact from others in the church. But as he continues his life in the church, it becomes a burden to continue hiding his background, and so he decides to confide in the pastor, Rev. Sugishita. Instead of acknowledging his pain, however, the pastor ends criticizing him for “weakness,” declaring that in the church, which stresses love of neighbor, there isn’t any discrimination.

This lack of understanding hurts Kobayashi deeply, and he feels he can no longer attend this church. The administrative board takes this issue up, and Mr. Ishikawa points out that the pastor was in error in how he handled it. However, the pastor, supported by the patriarchal pillar of the church, Mr. Hasegawa, doesn’t accept that, and so discord erupts in the church. The pastor does regret bringing on the confusion, but his apology is only in the form of expressing contrition before God. It is in this situation, that a new Bible Study called “Reading the Bible” is formed, with the participants studying on their own without the pastor, trying to get close to Jesus. There are three scenes in the play involving the Bible Study, all centering on the “Good Samaritan” passage, and the three lay members in those scenes share their thoughts. What did Jesus do and how did he
live? Whose "neighbor" was he? They each share what they learn from the Scriptures.

Next, a special church assembly is called, and the pastor again insists upon the correctness of his position. Together with board member Hasegawa, they try to push for a majority vote. The church, however, chooses diversity and depth of spirit instead. The last scene is a monolog by Mr. Kobayashi.

"I am who I am and you are who you are. I think it is wonderful if we can accept and support each other. How is it in your world? In your church, are you accepted and celebrated for who you are? I want to rejoice in the fact that each of us is a unique individual. Please go and do likewise."

These lines were penned with the intent of my deep desire that our world will become one in which all humans are valued. In our Kyodan General Assembly, we have the situation of the human rights of a pastor being trodden upon through the form of canceling his ministerial credentials because he practiced open communion. (Ed. note: meaning allowing non-baptized persons to receive communion in the church) Many voices have been raised in protest against this action, but the present leadership of the Kyodan has completely disregarded that.

At the previous General Assembly, the liberation play shown then, "Forty Days in the Wilderness," had that very theme at its core, portraying the act of the majority disregarding the minority as a kind of violation of human rights, something antithetical to the mind of Jesus. The Buraku Liberation Center is an organization that exists for the purpose of eliminating discrimination, and so I think that it cannot overlook such an example of the strong dispossessing the weak. Thus, our liberation plays have not only focused on buraku discrimination, but also such things as gender discrimination and discrimination against those with handicapping conditions. And since it is theater, it is not inappropriate to portray ideals that don't reflect the hard realities. However, unless liberation plays are produces with the reactions of the audience in mind, they are meaningless. While it is important to portray reality, simply telling of the severity of the discrimination could end up discouraging people, unless the message instills in those who view the play a sense of righteous anger against discrimination and a passion to eliminate it from society.

It is my conviction that liberation plays have the power to encourage those who view them to move forward in the fight to eliminate discrimination. Our efforts will not be in vain. The will to eliminate discrimination will bear fruit. We are not alone, and so we can build a society in which all are valued. That is the message that I wanted to communicate as I wrote this play. We received many expressions of appreciation, such as "I was encouraged," and "I want to join in the struggle to eliminate discrimination." Hearing those words, of course, is an encouragement to all of us as well, and so I am challenged to begin work on a new production.
Finally, there is one more thing I want people to know about the liberation plays. It takes months of preparation to produce a new play. We have to recruit the actors, write the script, learn the lines, and figure out the sound and lights as we practice numerous times. We are not professional actors, and have our own vocations to pursue. Thus, it is really quite a job. Sometimes, we have to take time off from work, and so recruiting the actors is a difficult process. I hope that all of you reading these words will support us in these efforts.

Solidarity Between The American Civil Rights Movement And Buraku Liberation

by Erika N. Turner

(Editor's Note: Erika was one of a group of 11 students from Wellesley College in Massachusetts who came to Japan in January to study Japanese religions, particularly as they relate to human rights issues. Led by Professor James Kodera, a native of Japan, they spent one day at BLC Activity Committee Chairperson Tanimoto's church to learn about Buraku issues, and Erika contributes this fascinating article reflecting on the connection she felt between the experience of Buraku people in Japan and "burakku (black) people" in America.)

Japan is the land of freedom in the eyes of many young Americans. In my own observations, I can even attest to the fact that many young black folk in particular seek to adopt Japanese culture as their own. Caught between the atrocities of American racial prejudice and an often narrow view of what black American culture should entail, there are many black youth who feel disconnected from their culture. At times they feel abandoned by it and other times they seek to abandon it, due to a feeling of imprisonment by black stereotypes and expectations. When presented with the diverse and fantastical world of Japanese entertainment, such as anime, manga, and music, these youth feel an indelible connection. Feeling like outsiders themselves, they are drawn to the sometimes outrageous and often anarchical worlds of Japanese media. To them, these forms of entertainment are representative of a culture that appreciates diversity and would be willing to nurture their desire to be recognized as unique and even contrarian.

Indeed, it is not only Japanese media that may lead a foreigner to these expectations. Having traveled there recently, I was struck by the technological advances I encountered, especially in Tokyo. At the airport, automatic walkways were designed to start and stop depending upon whether or not a passenger was present, a smart process that was both economical and environmentally sound. The more expensive trains were designed like airplanes, to gain the greatest speed and momentum. To the untrained eye, Japan is clearly the picture of progress.

Of course, progress in one area does not necessarily lend itself to progress in another. While many American youth, and black youth in particular, may see Japan as an alternative utopia for all their rebellious dreams, the truth is that Japan is a society based on uniformity. This is not to be taken lightly — it is not enough to simply say that Japan is uniform merely because both nationality and ethnicity are one in the same. Rather, Japan's leadership has cast-a mask over its society, portraying a country of perfect unity while neglecting the nature of the actual population, which truly is diverse. Thus, it is safe to say that the media that we love because of its uniqueness is not a reflection of the culture from which it came but rather a reflection of all of those within its society who wish it were different. The creators and the consumers share the same mentality, but we are not aware of the reality.

The reality is this: Japan is not perfect. It is not Eden. It is not free of prejudice — even
beyond "innocent" prejudice, a defense made by American Japanophiles on the behalf of the majority of Japanese who have little personal contact or exposure to non-Japanese. Japanese society, like every society, has a population that is discriminated against. And, like every society, Japan pretends that the problem does not exist, while the oppressed population is forced into silence and submission. It is shameful that many Japanophiles can name the top dramas and songs on the media charts by Japanese artists, but could not tell you what a Burakumin was, if ever they had heard of the term. I was not exempt from this ignorance. I was even more humbled when I learned that many Japanese who were interested in human rights had studied the American Civil Rights Movement and heeded the lessons of leaders like Martin Luther King, Jr. In fact, Taniguchi-sensei studied at a Historically Black College in America. Meanwhile, black youth are looking at Japan as a sign of hope and freedom.

This is not to discourage a love or interest in Japanese culture. Quite the contrary. In fact, it is with a love and interest in Japanese culture, and concern for the international community at large, that we must act. These comments are meant to recognize that, far from being unchangeable and foreign to us, Japan and its issues are far more similar to what we know than we realize. The uniqueness of Japanese society should not be downplayed. Certainly, its complex history and relationship with the ideas of purity and conformity are not to be ignored. Rather, I merely wish to shed light on our human commonality and, in doing so, I wish to draw attention to how we may be of use to those in the Burakumin community who may benefit from our acknowledgement and assistance. Japan is not so different that its struggles cannot be affected by foreign sympathy. We may not be scholars of Japanese culture, but we are knowledgeable of our own. Deriving what we know about the American Civil Rights Movement and, keeping in mind that it is being used as basis of anti-oppression movement in other cultures, just as it was inspired by the work of Gandhi in the Indian independence movement, we can recognize that the fight for equality by the Burakumin people is rather familiar. In doing so, we can act in solidarity, because we have the tools given to us by history.

We must show active concern for our fellow men and women in the Burakumin community and recognize our power to lend our voices and actions to their cause. I may never fully understand what it is to be Burakumin in Japan, but I do know what it means to be black in America. Knowing the struggles that my ancestors went through for over 300 years and the struggles we still face as a culture, I understand the struggles these people face, because they are the same. Indeed, the word "black" in English would be pronounced as "buraku" in Japanese. In a globalized world, fighting for the rights of one means fighting for the rights of all. Knowing that it is right and morally just to fight for the rights of the black man, woman, or trans-identified individual, it should follow that it is equally imperative to fight for rights of the buraku.

At What Cost?
The Nuclear Power Industry and Discrimination
by Tim Boyle

The March 11, 2011 earthquake and tsunami, along with the nuclear disaster that is a direct result, have plunged Japan into its worst crisis since WWII. The outpouring of concern and solidarity from around the world has been heartening to those of us in Japan, particularly in the affected areas of northeastern Japan. It will take years for Japan as a nation to recover from this triple disaster, but for the almost 30,000 people who lost their lives and the far larger figure of those who have lost loved ones, homes and
Fire truck sprays ocean water on one of the four damaged reactor buildings.

jobs, much will forever be lost.

Even a nation as well-prepared for natural disasters as Japan was woefully unprepared for the scope of this calamity, as there is really no way to adequately prepare for a monster tsunami up to 16 meters high along 500 km. of coastline. One place that should have been better designed to withstand the onslaught, however, was the nuclear facility in Fukushima. Built to withstand the “expected” height of a large tsunami, the 5.5-meter barrier was no match for the estimated 14-meter tsunami, and the present nuclear crisis was a direct result of both that inadequate design and an inability to manage such an unprecedented situation.

As the world’s attention is now focused on this developing disaster, the CWT editorial committee decided to address this issue from the standpoint of the exploited workers in the nuclear industry, some of who are of buraku descent. Prior to the tsunami, Japan had 54 operating nuclear reactors, which produced about 1/3 of its electric power. Three more multiple reactor plants were under construction with 10 more in advanced planning stages, all with the goal in mind of producing 40% of Japan’s increasing electrical demand by 2018.

How much these plans will be changed by the unfolding drama at Fukushima Daiichi remains to be seen, but surely this rude wake-up call will force a great deal of soul searching in Japanese society. As a part of that soul searching, we want to lift up the plight of the workers who are called on to do the dangerous work of maintaining these facilities, and now who are faced with the daunting task of cleaning up the mess and preventing a far worse situation from developing. Who are these people? And how are their human rights being addressed?

A good place to begin to understand this issue is a documentary produced by a Japanese photojournalist, Kenji Higuchi. You can view this bilingual documentary at the following site: http://video.google.com/videoplay?docid=4411946789896689299# He begins by saying, “I am Kenji Higuchi. I stumbled on these stories as a young photographer 20 years ago. It changed my life. The scenes I saw, the stories I heard: I found them difficult to believe at first. That workers go near the reactor and get exposed and that many of them get ill with radiation sickness and sometimes die. Or that these people are farmers or fisherman or laborers picked off the streets of the slums of Tokyo and Osaka. But when I started looking, I found so many of these people didn’t know what happened to them or, if they did, were too frightened to speak out. The thing that struck me was that all their stories were the same. During these years, I have scratched below the surface and discovered the underside of Japan — a side the world knows nothing about. People don’t believe that such a thing like this could happen in a country like Japan, a country where the companies are famous for treating their workers so well.”

He continues by interviewing workers who suffer from severe radiation-related health
problems and the families of those who have died. The “same story” they tell is one of both skilled and unskilled laborers being sent in to do clean-up and maintenance work where dangerous levels of radiation exist, but often without adequate protection or training. The treatment of such workers is often more like that of a tool to be used and then discarded when it’s no longer useable, rather than like valuable human beings created in the image of God. Many testified that they had not been informed of the danger of radiation and often were not even provided with masks. Their radiation exposure is monitored, and they are rotated frequently so that no one individual receives too much — in theory, that is. In actuality, however, such standards are difficult to maintain, sometimes accidentally mismanaged and sometimes overlooked in order to maximize profits. When one worker tried to take his case to court, it was thrown out because he couldn’t prove how much radiation he’d been exposed to. There is too much at stake for the state, and so individual human rights are ignored. Higuchi reports that in order to maintain a facade of respectability, the power companies often “buy silence” by giving injured workers a lump sum of 20 or 30 million yen.

What about the present cadre of workers trying to avoid a Chernobyl-type event? As of this writing at the end of March, it is widely reported that even now they are working under hellish conditions with only 2 meals a day of bland rations and one blanket to sleep on. What kind of treatment is that for these brave souls who literally are risking their lives for the rest of us? Some of them are reported to be victims of the tsunami itself, with missing family members and lost homes. The media, both Western and Japanese, express astonishment that things can’t be better coordinated than that.

In his 3/16 blog (http://groups.yahoo.com/group/CTSOS/message/8828), Higuchi states, “This is an accident that was bound to happen. TV and radio routinely refer to it as ‘beyond expectations.’ But when it comes to Big Science, it is wrong to use such a phrase. Unquestioning faith in our ability to control and exploit vast resources began in the era of oil, and it has continued into the era of nuclear power. Japan’s big energy industries have put the pursuit of profit ahead of the pursuit of humanity. It is common knowledge that earthquakes bring tsunamis. Tokyo Electric Power failed to fully incorporate this knowledge into their reactor systems. So now we have to listen time and again to people calling this catastrophe ‘beyond expectations.’ ... There is no way the phrase ‘beyond expectations’ should be tossed around so mindlessly at a time like this.”

As one who has “mindlessly” benefited from cheap, dependable energy for so long, there is a sense in which our present situation is “beyond expectations.” The question now is, “What do we do about it?” There are no easy solutions to our dilemma, and sacrifices (and some compromises) will no doubt be required. But whatever we do, the human rights of the workers who have to do the dirty work need to have top priority.

Crowned With Thorns Editorial Committee
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We appreciate your comments and suggestions concerning this newsletter and how to make improvements.

Like so many deserving ministries around the world in this time of economic uncertainty, the BLC is likewise feeling the budget squeeze. We ask for your prayer support, that God will give us the wisdom to make the best use of the resources we have, as well as increasing those resources. As always, contributions from sources both inside and outside of Japan are deeply appreciated. We now have a means for cashing US dollar checks without incurring banking fees, and so even small contributions are helpful.