Eleven years ago, I was the pastor of a Japanese church in Germany. At that time, there were many large demonstrations in Berlin and other cities around the country against the American incursion into Iraq. The protests in Japan, however, were very muted, as the prime minister of that time, Koizumi Jun’ichiro, fully supported the American military action, and he repeatedly criticized voices of protest against it. The executive secretary of the Liberal-Democratic Party, Abe Shinzo, strongly supported Koizumi, and he has now become the prime minister himself. Abe is now attempting to overturn the Peace Constitution that has protected this nation and make it into a nation that can wage war. His policies also favor the rich and oppress the weak in the society.

As I viewed Japan from the vantage point of Germany back then, I recall wondering why more people in Japan didn’t raise their voices against the politics of their own country, but now that I am in that same situation, I realize just how difficult it is to generate the strength necessary to effectively counter such policies. It may just be because Japanese culture has so inculcated its people to obey those in authority that they find it especially difficult to oppose the bad policies of its government.

However, as people who believe in the peace and justice of God, we must join forces and raise our voices of protest. While we entreat God to endow us with the courage and strength to do that, we would also be grateful to our brothers and sisters overseas for giving us your support and encouragement.

Oguri Ken, Pastor of Kobe Seiai Church
Thoughts Concerning the “Right to Collective Defense”

Rev. Yokoyama Jun’ichi
Higashi Kobe Church

As I look at how the US has welcomed Japan’s adoption of its so-called “right to collective defense,” I can’t help but be suspicious of this simply being part of the American strategy. The way that the Hatoyama administration caved into the pressure applied by the US after having stated their intention of having the Futenma Base in Okinawa to at the very least be relocated outside of Okinawa is particularly symbolic of this situation.

It’s the same situation with the introduction of the Osprey. All opposing opinions were brushed aside, and now it’s not only at the Futenma base, but all over Japan that we have training flights with this aircraft. On top of this, we see work being forced through on the development of the alternative site of Hennoko in Okinawa.

While most bases are concentrated in Okinawa, there are still plenty of US bases scattered around Japan, and so to be honest, I wonder if it’s accurate to call ourselves a truly independent nation. I really feel it is not an exaggeration to refer to Japan as vassal state of the United States.

However, as we look back over the last couple of decades, we can see the causes behind how the Japanese situation has developed. With the installment of Ishihara Shintaro as the governor of Tokyo in 1999, we saw repeated instances of his seemingly premeditated discriminatory remarks that are based on his own reinterpretation of history. He has referred to Chinese and other Asian peoples with derogatory terms that were used by Imperial Japan during the war years. Somewhat later, we saw the appearance of a similar character with the election of Hashimoto Toru as governor of Osaka Prefecture (presently the mayor of the city of Osaka). These two joined forces and formed a new political party called the “Restoration Party” for which they jointly held leadership. While they have since gone their separate ways, they had a big impact, and people became accustomed to their actions and words. In fact, quite a few people began to give in to their logic and even to accept the kind of values that simply should not be accepted, particularly in the area of human rights.

 Likewise, what was even more problematic were their political tactics, where they set up a kind of straw-man “enemy” that they then cleverly attacked in order to prop up their own “sense of justice.” While it was simply rhetoric, they were able to sway a good number of people to their point of view.

Recently, the United Nations Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination gave a recommendation to Japan to shore up its laws regarding hate speech, but it seems that no one in the administration is paying attention to that, and so the hate groups are continuing their rhetoric, which is simply the natural outcome of the type of politics being forced upon us.

Following the Fukushima Daiichi nuclear accident and the confused handling of the aftermath by the then governing Democratic Party of Japan, the DPJ lost soundly in the 2012 election, and the Liberal Democratic Party returned to power. [Ed. Note: The LDP, unlike its name, is the right-leaning party that has dominated Japanese politics for several decades.] The slogan that the LDP used at that time was, “Recovering Japan.”

Having once had the reigns of government taken from them by the DPJ, Prime Minister Abe and his LDP party simply bided their time in this atmosphere of the public feeling boxed in by the economic recession, and when the time was right made their comeback. However, the low voter turnout and the many issues surrounding the single-seat constituency system of parliamentary representation means that this was not necessarily what the people really desired.

Nevertheless, with the substantial
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majority the LDP now has in the Diet, Abe certainly feels that "Now is the time." It's also clear that he has a deep longing to clear the name of his grandfather, who had been held for investigation as a Class-A war criminal. So far, he has ramrodded the State Secrecy Law through, prior to getting tacit recognition of the so-called "right to collective defense." Now he's moving on to the remaining goals of revising (I would say corrupting) the constitution and instituting a military draft system. It would appear that he sees the way forward to doing just that.

Within this context, the right-leaning, patriotic mass media such as the Yomiuri and Sankei newspapers, publishers such as Kodansha and Shogakukan, etc. are bashing liberal media such as the Asahi as never before. Likewise, the real issues like the "comfort women" sex slaves during the war and the nuclear power plant disaster that shows no end in sight are being swept under the rug. They are intentionally pushing xenophobic attitudes and a whitewashing of history, along with a mood of anti-Chinese and anti-Korean sentiment.

Societal gaps are widening, and monitoring cameras are going up everywhere. The move to having a national identification number for everyone has already been decided. Teaching "morals" has been added to the school curriculum and the Japan Teachers' Union has been made out as those "criminals" who pushed "evil individualism" on students.

The "Japan that it (the LDP) wants to recover" has been recovered to that extent already. It is the worst situation Japan has been in since the end of WWII. We cannot but join together our voices of protest as we pray to God for his guidance and protection.

Buraku Liberation Youth Seminar "Alumni Meeting"

In addition to the regularly held Buraku Liberation Youth Seminar, we also held a kind of "alumni meeting" this year in Tokyo. Held at the Waseda Church and neighboring Waseda Hoshien Service Center from July 31 to August 2, 2014, twenty participants from as far away as Hiroshima joined together with those from the Osaka and Tokyo areas for this special event. For the past 16 years, youth from around Japan have come together to study the issue of buraku discrimination and liberation from such discrimination, and so the aim was for various leaders from the past to come together again for reflection and fellowship.

The program is designed to facilitate the sharing of concerns and thoughts among the participants as they continue to study together this issue.

On the second day, we took a field trip to the city of Sayama in neighboring Saitama prefecture to meet with Ishikawa Kazuo and his wife Sachiko to study anew about the infamous "Sayama Incident." The deeply rooted prejudice against people of the

Ishikawa Kazuo is the older gentleman in the middle of the front row.
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buraku was the backdrop for the drama that unfolded in that city, where Ishikawa was arrested and sentenced to the death penalty on completely trumped up charges. We walked along the course supposedly taken by Ishikawa more than 50 years ago as it was detailed in the official police report, noting the numerous places where it simply didn’t make any sense. Taken together, the evidence clearly shows that this was a case of a trumped-up charge that was completely false, and so we made a covenant with each other to become “new witnesses” of Ishikawa’s innocence and to communicate with the public what we had seen and heard. The participants were all of one voice in their desire to see Ishikawa’s name cleared and his civil rights restored.

One statement made during the discussion really stands out. It was concerning the final words of the historic “Levelers’ Association Proclamation,” where it says, “Let there be light in all human beings.” In Japanese, the word for human, “ningen,” is made up of two characters, one of which means “human person” and the other of which means “between” or “among.” Thus, literally, the term “ningen” means “among persons.” This is reminiscent of the words of Jesus, when he said, “The Kingdom of God has come among you.” It’s when light comes “among persons” (ningen = human beings) that the Kingdom of God is realized. It is in that “Light” that we find our hope.

“Buraku Liberation” is a liberation that aims to come to both those who are discriminated against as well as those who have done the discrimination. Its goal is to be a “leveling” agent in human relations that have been warped by discrimination and prejudice, and through that to liberate people from the restrictions of prejudice. This was the thought that we shared together in this seminar.

Report on Buraku Liberation Youth Seminar

Goto Kei, Chairperson of Planning Committee

The Buraku Liberation Center sponsored their 17th Buraku Liberation Youth Seminar from August 26-29, with the theme, “Light to Humanity: Going from Indignation to Light.” This year, the seminar was held in Hiroshima Prefecture, in the cities of Hiroshima, Kure and Fukuyama. Including part-time participants, about 50 youth from around the country gathered together for this event. This included a few from non-Kyodan churches as well as students from church-related universities or other facilities.

We began in the city of Kure, where we visited a buraku community. We observed how facilities such as funeral parlors, cemeteries, animal control centers and other such facilities that regular neighborhoods want to avoid have been concentrated. Likewise, we could see how the water and sewer systems for the area had been neglected. This, of course, has been the situation for buraku areas for a long time, as
local officials look down on buraku people, and so we all felt a sense of indignation concerning this. We spent the night at the Hiroshima Shujo Church and during the morning of the 27th, we held an introductory lecture on the buraku discrimination issue, which included the viewing of a documentary about a meat-processing plant operated by a family in the discriminated-against buraku. That afternoon, we held a study session on the Sayama Incident.

Following that we moved to a new location in Fukuyama, where we spent the night at the Honjo Community Center. The evening program centered around meeting with local people affiliated with the Buraku Liberation League’s chapter in Fukuyama. They told us of the issues they are facing, such as raising up new leadership for the movement and firming up their own identity. These, of course, are the same issues that we face in the Buraku Liberation movement within the Kyodan as well.

On the morning of the 28th, we visited the Museum of Human Rights and Peace Issues in Fukuyama, were we listened to a presentation, and then in the afternoon, we took a field trip to a discriminated-against buraku area of that city. It was quite a bit smaller than the community we visited in Kure, and so the difficulties it faces are different.

Each evening, following the program, we had a lively time of discussion and follow-up. While some of the participants had been involved in the buraku liberation movement for some time, for many others, this was their first exposure. Each person was able to share their own thoughts without fear of being criticized or put down, and this is one of the strengths of the youth seminar. This was particularly evident on the final evening, as we looked back on our experiences. There were serious questions that were raised and confusion concerning things that
participants were still trying to work out in their own minds. But we were able to create a space in which each participant felt acceptance.

This was the first time that this annual event was held in Hiroshima, and in fact, in the promotional materials that we produced, we included the phrase, “We have been having this youth seminar in Kansai for a long time, and so in a certain sense, it’s become a bit too familiar. How about let’s step out of this situation into a new setting where we can interact with new people and reawaken our slumbering selves.” This expressed the desire of the planning committee to go to a different setting than where it’s been held before, with the expectation of learning new things from people in an entirely different setting. As we now look back on the event, I can say that for the most part, this expectation was realized. It was a time for the participants and staff, along with the people in the Nishi Chugoku District of the Kyodan, when a new wind blew through our midst, awakening us from our slumber. It is my hope that this fresh breeze blowing in our hearts will not simply die out into the doldrums again, but will help us deal with the issues ahead.

Buraku Liberation Center Report
Kobayashi Akira

The BLC sponsored “National Conference of Buraku Liberation Activists” in Aizu Wakamatsu from June 9 to 11, with 230 participants.

Towards the end of 2013, the BLC received a large grant from the Waldensenes in Italy, which was funneled through EMS in Germany, and we have been utilizing that in 10 projects. The most important of these have been giving lectures that include the showing of the DVD “The Sayama Incident,” which documents the unjust conviction of Ishikawa Kazuo on trumped up charges, publishing a collection of sermons, the annual youth seminar and the production of the Liberation Play. We are very appreciative of the financial support we receive from overseas and are very encouraged by it.

The Liberation Play, “The Traditions of Men,” has already been performed in Shiga, Tottori and Osaka. The next performance of this play will be at the Kyodan General Assembly on Oct. 29. Next year, we are planning on holding performances at even more locations around Japan. If possible, we would even like to give a performance someplace overseas, but, of course, that would be difficult indeed.

Japan is presently increasing its military power, and successive bills have been passed in the parliament that are leading Japan down the path towards being a nation that can engage in war. I can’t help but think
that this nation never really repented of the war of 70 years ago. We are engaged in protests and rallies against war, but the tide is against us. We appeal to our brothers and sisters overseas to raise your voices against Japan’s actions.

“I Can Never Go Back to Being My Former Self”
Rev. Ida Mizuho, Mizunoguchi Church, Kanagawa District

It’s been twenty years since I became involved with the issue of Chernobyl and radiation. One phrase from that was often repeated in the contaminated areas of Belarus was the phrase “the only thing that remains at the end is your relationships of trust,” and that is something that keeps coming to my mind. After the fall of the Soviet Union, the Republic of Belarus, which was the primary victim, was a society with no money and lots of secrets. After announcing that the soil contamination rates were low, the government declared that the Chernobyl disaster had been brought to a close. However, the areas with the highest radiation levels were basically just abandoned. People living in these areas simply don’t believe the government and have formed grassroots relationships with foreigners, which is the only thing that gives them hope.

One of the reasons I wanted to attend the National Conference of Buraku Liberation Activists was to meet with members of the “Aizu Radiation Information Center.” As someone who has been involved with Chernobyl over the years, I feel a certain responsibility for the situation here in Japan, and so the people there have been on my mind ever since visiting them in June of last year. I had heard from them so many accounts of the pain and anger of those affected and how they provided a place for people to express their pain. One mother breaking down and crying, saying that she was so frustrated by what should be a joyous time of raising her children. There were mothers and children who had evacuated their homes on their own accord as well as those who had been forced to leave, and some of them faced struggles with their husbands because of the differing understandings of radiation danger. One of them told those of us at the conference, “My husband has told me that radiation has gone to my head and to just forget about it, but I can never go back to being my former self.” The feelings of anger and sadness these people express are helping to awaken those around them.

Returning to the topic of Belarus, the issue of the worsening health of nuclear workers became apparent in the 1990’s, and the democratization movement became quite popular. However, the politics there became increasingly dictatorial, and now it is basically a dictatorship. It’s now been 28 years since the disaster, and many organizations have come and gone. One small organization, however, has remained, and with the support of foreign entities, they have been able to serve the people by developing programs to protect children, because the government can’t be depended on.

Last year, as I visited the high-radiation zones in Belarus, I came to the realization that ever since the Fukushima accident, it is no longer easy to gain access to the high-radiation zones. Our group had government monitors with us, and so I really sensed how the International Commission on Radiological Protection, which is an organization that promotes nuclear power, was also monitoring us. The so-called “Nuclear Power Village” is not only a Japanese phenomenon, but a world-wide power.

Nevertheless, while even standing before such power, “we can never go back to being my former selves,” and so our only choice is to continue to link together. As the leader of the Aizu Radiation Information Center, Kataoka Terumi said, “Even though we are in different situation and may have divergent opinions, if we don’t stick
together, we lose.” I wonder how many such movements have lost their power because of such splits. The Japanese government has used the term “fuhyo higai” (financial damage caused by harmful rumors or misinformation) in such a way to make it sound like the victims are somehow at fault.

At any rate, this kind of solidarity, where people trying to overcome various forms of discrimination and violence take an interest in each other’s differing efforts is something I want to promote. It’s important for maintaining such projects as the Aizu Radiation Information Center and the Tohoku District Radiation Problem Response and Support Center “Izumi.” I pray that we can work together to promote a society in which we can weep with those who weep and laugh with those who laugh instead of a society where the rich get richer at the expense of the oppressed.

**Field Trip to a Buraku Community in Tohoku**

By Aoki Mariko, member of Higashi Umeda Church, Osaka

“I have heard people say, ‘There are no buraku communities in Tohoku, and so I can’t relate to the issue.’ But there are such communities in Tohoku with people who are still experiencing discrimination, and so I want those people to know about this reality.” These were the words with which Higashitani Makoto began the National Conference of Buraku Liberation Activists in Aizu. In the materials that were handed out at the beginning, it stated that in Tohoku, and particularly in the Aizu region, there were buraku communities that were still experiencing serious discrimination. As I wanted to learn more about such discriminated-against buraku, I signed up for the field trip that was planned for the third day of the conference. That also because I felt ashamed that up until this time I had not become involved with this issue of buraku discrimination.

As we were handed the map of our route, we were told, “Please do give sufficient consideration wherever we go.” This field trip was a real eye-opener for me, as it seems that it is only when you actually walk through the places being discussed and see them with your own eyes that you really get an understanding of the situation. “Here is where the irrigation canal is.” This was the spot indicated on the map, but as we looked down at it, it seemed like an ordinary canal with water flowing along at a pretty good clip. But then we could see that this canal that had been flowing east to west suddenly took a turn to the north just before it came to the buraku area. We were at a loss for words, as the water that is so basic to life and health was being denied to this community, as it was obvious that it had purposely been routed around the buraku area. These people were simply forced to suffer in silence, and yet it was being stated that there aren’t any buraku communities in the area and such discrimination does not exist here. The local government has avoided putting in infrastructure into that neighborhood, which is in a low-lying area, and so the water from snow-melt and heavy rains often flows into the area, getting under houses and causing damage. Likewise, there were even areas without drainage ditches, and yet they say, “They don’t exist and there is no discrimination here,” as they try to hide away the problem. Frankly, I found the depth of the problem of buraku discrimination quite shocking.

Prior to going to the conference, I was talking with a friend about being a member of the delegation going to Aizu to deal with the issue of buraku discrimination, and she replied, “Buraku discrimination? Isn’t that a bit out of date now?” That illustrated to me how most people simply don’t know about the situation without being told about it, and in fact, they often simply don’t want to know. Not only does indifference hide the damage that is done but it actually increases it, as new acts of discrimination are overlooked. Indifference is itself a form of discrimination. Ever since I returned from that conference, I have been...
looking for every opportunity to communicate to people the reality of buraku discrimination. Some may say that just one individual's efforts won't do much, and perhaps that is true. But even a slender branch, if it's combined with many others into a tight bundle, becomes strong and cannot be easily broken. The same is true with each voice that is raised in protest to discrimination, as together we can become a strong force in the movement to eliminate buraku discrimination. This is what I so deeply felt as I gather with people of like mind at the National Conference of Buraku Liberation Activists in Aizu.

**Tying It All Together: Abe and Discrimination**

Tim Boyle

The last couple of issues of CWT have featured several articles dealing with the present Abe administration's efforts to remake Japan into a nation that relies on military strength and economic might to assert its self-interest in the world. What I would like to do in this brief article is to tie these disturbing trends together with the common thread of their historical roots, as well as look at how they relate to the root causes of buraku discrimination.

What got me thinking about this topic was an article on the Asahi Shimbun's English website entitled, "Abe praised Class-A war criminals for being 'foundation' of Japan's prosperity." (http://ajw.asahi.com/article/behind_news/politics/AJ201408270054) The gist of the article is that Prime Minister Abe and other members of his administration are trying to sanitize Japan's wartime record and rehabilitate the reputations of leaders of the Japanese war effort who were convicted of war crimes. Similar to the enshrining of

One of hundreds of memorials various groups have established at Koyasan.
Class-A war criminals at Yasukuni Shrine in Tokyo, there is also a Buddhist memorial at Koyasan south of Osaka, where annual services are held in their memory.

This year's memorial service was held on April 29, and while not attending in person, Abe sent an official message the translation of which reads in part, "I would like to sincerely express my feelings of remembrance to the spirit of the Showa Era [the reign of Emperor Hirohito] martyrs who staked their souls to become the foundation of their nation so that Japan could achieve the peace and prosperity of today."

Abe has a personal interest in this, as his own grandfather was included in that category. Kishi Nobusuke (1896-1987) was a member of wartime Prime Minister Tojo's cabinet, and was detained for quite some time by the GHQ for investigation as a possible Class A war criminal. Kishi was finally released in 1948, and after restrictions were lifted in 1952 with the end of the occupation, he reentered politics, becoming prime minister and serving for about 3½ years from 1957-1960. Interestingly, his younger brother, Sato Eisaku, became prime minister a few years later. (The different last name was the result of Kishi being adopted as a young man into the Kishi family to carry on the family name, a common practice in Japan.)

While political dynasties are certainly not unheard of in other countries with representative governments (e.g. the Bush family), it seems to be a fixture of Japanese politics.

The moves to institute a more authoritarian government and to rewrite the Peace Constitution according to their liking are all related to a kind of "Manifest Destiny" mindset that views Japan as having been victimized by circumstances that forced it to procure the resources it needed for the industrial expansion necessary to "catch up with the West," and the leadership rationalized it as rescuing Asia from western domination (under their control, of course). The atomic bombs dropped on Hiroshima and Nagasaki, along with the other devastation of the war furthered this victim complex, which in turn fuels the political agenda of downplaying the many atrocities Japan committed and its role as aggressor.

Unlike Germany, which thoroughly repudiated its Nazi past, Japan only half-heartedly did so, keeping its national anthem and flag unchanged. Imagine what would happen if German Chancellor Merkel sent a similar message concerning those convicted at Nuremburg. The criticism from German citizens would be intense, to say the least. But that hasn't happened in Japan.

So how does this all relate to Buraku discrimination? It basically has the same root — a root that goes deep into the soil of ethno-centricty and superiority. The emperor system is based in Shinto creation mythology, and it is this that in the minds of many traditional Japanese has given them special status in the human family. The Japanese certainly aren't unique in having succumbed to this temptation, but it has played itself out especially strongly in this country during its long history. It results in the falsehood that it is ethically permissible to use other people groups for your own ends instead of viewing them as of equal worth, as fellow creatures of God who are created in his image. That is exactly the same rationale behind buraku 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, Rev. Honma Mayumi.
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