

November, 2001

The Japanese Rightists' Diatribe Against the Women's International War Crimes Tribunal

By
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The Women's International War Crimes Tribunal (December 2000, Tokyo, Japan), and its related meetings were met with the intrusive interference of rightists, resulting in, among other things, the cancellation of a meeting and a watered-down TV broadcast. Here are some notes on the rightists' thoughts and logic as I perceived them while dealing with them at meetings, and from reports by Yayori Matsui, representative of VAWW-NET Japan, who the rightists made into their main target.

State Nationalism Antagonistic to Other Asian Countries

These meetings have had many participants from other Asian countries, including China, Korea, and the Philippines, and the chants of the rightists included shouts of "Go Home," "Get out," and "Don't fool with Japan/Japanese." Japanese participants were told to "Go to China or Korea if you hate Japan." At the Ministry of Culture, where we formed a human chain in protest of the ministry's sanctioning of a prejudiced/self-righteous history textbook, "Don't give in to foreign pressure," was their message.

They call Japanese participants "anti-Japan." Although it is no longer possible for many of us to determine just what either "Japan" or "anti-Japan" might stand for, on the part of the rightists there is only one cohesive Japan, the essence of which is grounded in government policies and support for conservative ideals. They are fiercely hostile to Asian countries that opposed the Japanese government's policy regarding history textbooks. Therefore, any Japanese who seems to be in solidarity with peoples from those countries is simply labeled "anti-Japan." They call the Japanese coordinators "traitors," in Japanese, literally, "those who sell one's country." For them, such accusations signify their own unity with Japan as a state. That state is centered on tenno (the emperor), thus they blame us for "Having made guilty His Gracious Majesty the Emperor."

For them, our border-free solidarity and our affection for the natural landscape and the people of our communities would simply be interpreted as or minimized into state relations. Their nationalism is state-oriented hostility to China or Korea, which could be detrimental to the stability of East Asia.

Hostility against the Women's Movement for Justice

One rightist claimed that we employ a double-standard because we do not address the human rights of the Korean women in Kabukicho (Japan's biggest prostitution area), contradicting my position as a human rights lawyer. This is their logic: to sound sympathetic to sexually exploited women, but to justify "comfort women as authorized prostitutes (thus, not at all illegal)." Indeed, they seem quite confident about the "comfort women as prostitutes" theory which they have been insistent on debating with us. They are entirely unaware of the fact that the military sexual slavery, being dependent on an enormous number of girls from former Japanese colonies (Korea and Taiwan), leaves no room to argue the possibility that they were prostitutes.

Meanwhile they continued to crush women's efforts for justice. They put pressure on NHK (a public broadcasting company) which eventually broadcast a watered-down/off-the-point program on the Tribunal (which NHK denies, legal case pending). A meeting on July 7, 2001, was suspended because one of them threw a can and

injured a participant. This incident seems to be one reason that Chiyoda Ward (a municipal government in Tokyo) cancelled a forum at which Ms. Matsui was to be a guest speaker. Incidentally, the response of NHK and Chiyoda Ward exposed the establishment as being fundamentally associated with the rightists.

The historical significance of this women's movement, to overturn Emperor Hirohito's immunity and to obtain a judgment of guilt against him, the man who was the supreme commander of wartime Japan, has created an opportunity for Japanese society to be fundamentally reborn. Yet, for the rightists, it is an inexcusable crime as it shakes the heart of their ideals - imperial Japan.

Authoritarianism (1) Looking for Charisma

One of the rightists who exchanged cards with me said he did not have to meet with lawyers but Matsui. One placard called a collaborative scholar "Matsui's toady." Matsui is the target.

Ms. Matsui reported that "white Christianity" has become the rightists' other justification after the collapse of international communism. It is now clear why a woman who I mistakenly thought to be on our side and who I invited to join responded awkwardly. She held a sign saying "freedom to follow a different religion," meaning "no Christian rule."

The rightists equate us with Aum (a cult group that released poison gas on subways, killing and injuring many people.) It is their understanding that we are brainwashed by one charismatic leader. Their thinking is based on this unrealistic yet quite authoritarian assumption that a movement can be crushed by striking its leader. Thus they targeted Ms. Matsui and interrupted her speech with violence on July 7, leading up to the cancellation of her meeting sponsored by Chiyoda Ward.

Authoritarianism (2) Terminology & Manipulation

Postwar rightists have become eloquent in that they are capable of using terms such as human rights, freedom, or peace; terms that a wartime pure-bred fascist boy like me could never imagine them mentioning. They were much less fanatic than I had imagined.

There was an active party that posted "Free Tibet" signs. Some blamed smokers for being a nuisance to the public. They even claimed themselves to be anti-war, or called us "autistic" for not accepting a debate when people should promote better understanding through discussion. When the police arrived, the rightists criticized us for "hiding behind the authorities." One of their major criticisms against the Tribunal has been "the lack of due process of law."

They utilize the dominant ideals of modern society - human rights, freedom, peace, debate, or due process of law - only to the extent that is allowed by the authorities. We should note that these dominant, shared ideals could also be used to conceal unjust rulings. The use of these words is both a characteristic and a contradiction of today's rightists. They employ sophisticated terms in argument, and use force to repress our freedom of speech.

Closing

The presence of rightists at our fora was inevitably accompanied by that of the police. The police were not effective, however, in preventing the rightists' repeated interference with our speech. But plain clothes police often stopped violent rightists. As historical fact shows us that the police will cooperate with a counter-movement provided that it breaks away from the main opposition, there is the possibility that the police will use us to split the civil movement by being collaborative and raising our dependence on them. Strengthening citizens' solidarity and fortifying our own organization is also needed to minimize police intervention that might be exercised under the pretext of rightist turmoil.