

BUDDHIST TO OPEN CAMPAIGN IN U. S.

Japanese Offers a Political and Religious Faith

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TOKYO, Jan. 7 — Daisaku Ikeda, a confident young man of 34, will leave for the United States tomorrow to spread the doctrines of a militant Buddhist sect that has become a political force in Japan and, he hopes, will become a political force throughout the world.

Waiting for Mr. Ikeda as he journeys through the United States will be about 3,000 American families who begin every morning with a prayer:

"Praise thee to the lotus sutar of the good law."

They are members of the American chapter of the Soka Gakkai — the value-creation society — an organization headed by Mr. Ikeda that now includes more than 3,000,000 Japanese families. From the United States Mr. Ikeda will go to Europe to visit other members of the Soka Gakkai helping to organize new chapters, gain converts and examine the faithful on the progress of their religious studies.

There are Japanese who are fearful of the Soka Gakkai and Japanese who are puzzled by it. But these days, there are few Japanese who dismiss it casually.

A Colorful Party

Mr. Ikeda heads an organization that received 11.5 per cent of the ballots cast in Japan's last parliamentary election. It holds the balance of power in Tokyo politics, commands a substantial treasury and has created a feeling of zeal and participation that has made each of its members a devoted missionary.

The Soka Gakkai says its main purpose is religious, to spread the preachings of a 13th-century Buddhist teacher, Nichiren. It considers Nichiren Buddhism the only true religion in the world and itself the only true interpreter of Nichiren.

There are many Buddhist sects in Japan, including others following Nichiren, but the Soka Gakkai moved to the front of the Japanese stage after World War II by organizing itself as a political party. It now had 15 seats in the Upper House of the Japanese Diet (Parliament). This makes it the third largest party in the House, considerably smaller than the ruling Liberal Democrats or the Socialists, but totally disciplined.

The organization plans to put up 1,200 candidates in the spring local elections and, as one spokesman put it, "to elect 1,200." The Soka Gakkai has never lost an election, principally because it only contests those in districts where it is strong.

Because Soka Gakkai considers itself not only a Japanese but a world religion it is now trying to build a world political party. Its spokesmen say that they have not decided just what platforms it will present but speak vaguely of "neo-socialism" and define this as socialism plus civil freedoms.

To Fight 'Persecution'

Leaders of the organization say they have gone into politics to protect themselves from "persecution." They point out that before World War II they were harassed by the Japanese police and their leader died in jail.

Many of Japan's politicians are not quite sure what to make of the Soka Gakkai. But they are sure of its proved ability to get the votes of all its members.

In the spring, Tokyo will elect a new governor and the Soka Gakkai's 500,000 votes in the Tokyo prefecture are almost three times the number of votes that divided the successful Liberal Democratic candidates from the Socialist candidates in the last election.

Most of the Soka Gakkai households in the United States are of Japanese background. In addition, there are a number of Japanese wives of former American soldiers in Japan who became converts and converted their husbands after they moved to the United States.

Sociologists, Japanese and foreign, have been earnestly trying to figure out the appeal of a militant sect in a country that takes its religion rather placidly.

As near as they can come to an answer, the appeal is a compound of three things:

The promise of material as well as spiritual happiness, the ability to make members feel that they themselves are missionaries and therefore have meaningful roles in life, and the attraction of a demanding religious and political discipline to millions of Japanese who felt their familiar values destroyed by the war and the social upheaval that followed it.