

Buddhist Sect in Japan Accused Of Effort to Suppress Criticism

By TAKASHI OKA
Special to The New York Times

TOKYO, Jan. 10 — The Komeito, the militant Buddhist political party that won 47 seats in the Dec. 27 election for the House of Representatives is embroiled in a controversy regarding freedom of speech.

The dispute, arising out of charges by the Communist party that Komeito representatives tried to suppress publication of a book critical of its parent religious body, the Soka Gakkai, is expected to be taken up in the Diet, or Parliament, in the session that begins next week.

In the controversy, the Japan Communist party, which also did well in last month's election, raising its representation from four to 14 seats, is cast in the role of defending freedom of speech against the Komeito's alleged efforts to suppress critical publications.

The Communist charge has brought into the open widely entertained fears regarding tendencies toward authoritarianism within the Komeito and the Soka Gakkai. Analysis and criticism of both bodies in the Japanese press and other communications channels has long been muted, presumably out of fear of the massive economic and political power they wield.

Group Has Grown Rapidly

The Soka Gakkai, or Value Creation Society, founded in 1937, is a vigorous and fast-growing organization of lay believers of the Nichiren Shoshu Buddhist sect. Its 41-year-old President, Daisaku Ikeda, is often considered the real leader of the Komeito, which was established in 1964, although he holds no formal post in the political party.

The book on which the dispute centers is titled "Slashing the Soka Gakkai." Published early in November, it has become a bestseller, with more than 140,000 copies distributed already and a fifth printing under way. The author, Prof. Hirotsu Fujiwara, is a well-known, non-Communist author, commentator and political scientist. His book purports to be an exposé of the opportunism of the Soka Gakkai and of Mr. Ikeda.

In mid-December, in a television debate during the election campaign a Communist party Representative accused the Komeito of putting pressure on a publisher not to print Mr. Fujiwara's book.

The Komeito Representative denied the charge. The Communists continued pressing the issue. Last Monday, the Komeito chairman, Yoshikatsu Takeiri, held a news conference at which he formally denied the

Communist accusation as "a slander without any factual basis."

The Communist charges included an assertion that Kakuei Tanaka, secretary general of the ruling Liberal-Democratic party, had met Professor Fujiwara, a personal acquaintance, to get him to abandon his book project.

Mr. Tanaka denied this week that the Komeito had specifically asked him to perform this task, but acknowledged that he had met Mr. Fujiwara. "It was nothing so spectacular as trying to buy up a person's word," Mr. Tanaka said at a news conference. "Suppose a friend is given a bad write-up in a magazine, one would go to that magazine and ask it not to be so harsh. That is about what I did."

The Communists seized on these statements as proof of pressure and published a slashing editorial in their newspaper, Akahata, accusing the Komeito of telling lies.

Advertising Blocked

Mr. Fujiwara has also stated publicly that Mr. Tanaka tried to get him not to publish the book.

In an interview, publisher of the book, Takayuki Minakawa, said that early in the fall, Komeito and Soka Gakkai representatives called repeatedly on him to urge him not to publish Mr. Fujiwara's book.

He was promised lucrative publication rights for books recommended by the Soka Gakkai if he agreed, he said.

Mr. Minakawa said he had turned down these requests and advanced the book's publication date by three weeks to Nov. 6. He tried to advertise the book in commuter trains, but was unable to buy space, being told that the ideographic characters for "Slashing the Soka Gakkai" were too large and therefore agitational.

He also tried to get Japan Book Sales and Tokyo Book Sales, Japan's two leading book wholesalers, to circulate the books nationwide, he said, but was told that he would have to obtain orders himself from individual bookstores.

"But since the Communists brought these facts into the open, orders have poured in," Mr. Minakawa said.

The publisher said he suspected pressure on advertising agencies and booksellers by the Soka Gakkai, which exerts strong influence in the publishing field because of the millions of members who read its books, magazines and newspapers.