

Journalism Professor Lectures on Journalistic Reform
By JEFF FARR, Associate Editor
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Innocent until proven guilty? Think again. Professor Kenichi Asano feels both the Japanese and U.S. press are forgetting this point.

In a lecture at the World Peace Ikeda Auditorium tonight, Professor Asano, a former journalist who now teaches at Japan's Doshisha University, expressed concern over the media's tendency to accuse innocent people of crimes before they've had their day in court.

Richard Jewell, who was made a culprit in the Olympic bombing case, is an example, said Professor Asano, who was in the United States for two weeks to share his views on Japanese media with editors of several major newspapers. Though never arrested or formally charged, Mr. Jewell was essentially tried by the media for three months last year.

In much the same way, Professor Asano, who is not a Soka Gakkai member, believes SGI President Ikeda is being unfairly judged by the Japanese media. Mentioning as an example of this the Nobuhira case — in which, despite all evidence to the contrary, weekly magazines have tried to portray President Ikeda as a rapist — Professor Asano revealed some of the major reasons why he feels the SGI president and the Soka Gakkai organization in Japan are so regularly berated by the press.

The first reason he gave is simply that President Ikeda is a religious person, that the Soka Gakkai is a religious organization — and the Japanese press is anti-religion, Professor Asano believes. "People working in the news media, generally speaking, don't have any religion, so they don't meet religious people at all," he claimed. "Without meeting Soka Gakkai members, they have preconceptions or prejudices toward the organization."

Next, the professor pointed out that the publishing companies now attacking President Ikeda and the Soka Gakkai in Japan have a long history of depending on government authorities, which feel threatened by the Soka Gakkai's independence, as their primary source of information. Especially the publishing companies Shinchosha and Bungei Shunju, which have been relentlessly attacking the Soka Gakkai, cooperated with Japanese militarist government during World War II in trying to convince the citizenry that the emperor was a god — a god worth dying for in war.

These two companies survived, and in fact thrived, in the postwar era, which Professor Asano highlighted as much different than what happened in postwar Italy and Germany. In those countries, publishers who had cooperated with militarism were dismantled.

The professor also explained that the Japanese press is an elite — one that he sees as more in touch with the government than with the people. Most Japanese journalists are from prestigious universities, and 92 percent of the writers are male, he said. They cannot sympathize with the people's feelings, Professor Asano argued, especially with marginalized or socially disadvantaged people.

"I call the Japanese media the lap dog of the establishment," he said, adding that this out-of-touch elite has undue influence on the Western press, especially foreign correspondents in Tokyo.

Finally, Professor Asano said that the Soka Gakkai troubles the Japanese press because it is one of the few organizations in Japan entirely independent from the government.

"Ultra-rightist groups or rightist groups and people who still believe the emperor is a god are afraid of the Soka Gakkai," Mr. Asano emphasized, concluding that he hopes "the Soka Gakkai *will* challenge this."

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