

The New Human Revolution, Volume 6, Chapter 4
Rough Seas
BY HO GOKU – ILLUSTRATED BY KENICHIRO UCHIDA

Translation of parts 19–24 of the ‘Rough Seas’ chapter, as printed in the *Seikyo Shimbun*, the Soka Gakkai’s daily newspaper. Ho Goku is the pen name of Daisaku Ikeda, who appears in the novel as Shin’ichi Yamamoto. The events take place in 1962.

The Soka Gakkai members looked to the Komei representatives to dedicate themselves to the people and fight for their interests. Shin’ichi Yamamoto wanted the representatives to live up to that expectation, no matter what the circumstances.

If they were to stray from that path and fall into the snares of self-interest and personal ambition, becoming corrupt and degenerate, all the effort expended in electing them, and in forming Komei, would be wasted. Shin’ichi delivered this severe warning to prevent that tragedy from occurring.

In closing, he called to the members, “With a renewed spirit and renewed commitment to our goals, let us advance forward with unbreakable unity, reaping boundless benefit as we go!”

In this atmosphere of rejoicing over the election victory, the second half of the year got off to a dynamic start. Shin’ichi was aware, however, that their victory would be viewed as a threat by the other parties and was bound to have major repercussions. An article in the July 4 evening edition of the leading daily newspaper, *Asahi Shimbun*, entitled “Soka Gakkai — the Third Force in the Upper House,” revealed the attitudes of the other parties. It read:

The Liberal Democratic Party does not see the Soka Gakkai growing into a political force that could pose a potential threat to it in the future. As the examples of previous new religions have shown, the more fervid the religious organization the more quickly it fades from the scene. And the Liberal Democrats believe that the Soka Gakkai’s foray into politics will peak early and quickly reach its limit.

The impact of the Soka Gakkai’s victories on the Socialist and Communist parties, however, is more severe than on the ruling conservative party. The way that the Soka Gakkai ate into the membership of the Hokkaido coal miners’ union recently is still fresh in the minds of progressive party leaders.

The working class, it is generally held, is not especially interested in religion. But as of late, the Soka Gakkai is gaining support even among such organized workers as the Japan Teachers Union and the National Railway Workers Union, causing leaders of the Socialist Party to question their party policies and daily activities and to continue to look into methods for mounting a counteroffensive against the inroads being made by the Soka Gakkai.

It is unclear whether the LDP really held the view that the Gakkai was of no importance, or if it merely tried to make it seem so to give the appearance of confidence in its position as the ruling party. But it was true that the leaders of the labor movement felt threatened by the Gakkai’s dramatic advance. In fact, after the Upper House election, certain labor unions placed insidious pressure on union members who also belonged to the Soka Gakkai. Two unions in particular, the Osarizawa Mine in Osarizawa, Akita Prefecture, and the Nakazato Mine in Sasebo, Nagasaki Prefecture, actually expunged Gakkai members from the union rolls.

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In the northern part of Akita Prefecture,¹ about four kilometers west of Rikuchu-Hanawa Station on the Japan National Railways Hanawa Line, a winding road led to an area of rust-brown mountainside, bare of any trees or vegetation. A jumble of ore-sorting and smelting factories were huddled together at the foot of the mountain, and about halfway up the slope stood a tall, smoke-belching chimney. This was the Osarizawa Mine.

One of Japan's three largest copper mines, Osarizawa had a long history and track record in the mining industry. In addition to copper, the staple of its large-scale operations, it produced gold, silver and zinc. The mine was unionized, and it was here that incidents of Soka Gakkai members being expelled from union membership took place.

Gakkai members in the Tohoku region,² of which Osarizawa was a part, supported Komei candidate Hisao Seki in the nationwide constituency for the Upper House election. In the town of Osarizawa (within present-day Kazuno City³), Seki had received 305 votes.

Seki had won a seat, placing 26th out of 51 winning candidates. The progressive party candidate backed by the mine's labor union had only managed to slide in at the very bottom of the rankings, after a close-fought battle and with only a slim margin over the next candidate, who missed winning a seat, of some 1,700 votes.

This bitter election struggle, which had almost seen the union's candidate defeated, and the unexpectedly strong support the town had given the Gakkai-backed Seki, had created a situation that the Osarizawa mine union leaders felt they could not afford to ignore.

In the early 1960s, the mine was flourishing, and at one point more than 90 percent of the town's tax revenues came from mine-generated earnings. The town had more televisions per capita than any other in Japan. The mine employed about 3,000 workers and, when family members were included, about 70–80 percent of the town's population of around 10,000 were in some way connected to the mine.

The labor union at the Osarizawa mine was also one of the strongest and most important in the Japanese Federation of Metal Miners Unions. The Osarizawa union leaders felt threatened by the Soka Gakkai members' election activities, fearing that if things continued as they were their base of support would be badly eroded.

On July 6, a few days after the elections, Hisaya Yamao, a mine worker and Soka Gakkai district chief, was called into the union office. Yamao was about 50, a warm, friendly man. A veteran miner with some 20 years experience at Osarizawa, he was also a town assembly representative, an indication of the trust and respect his peers accorded him.

His wife, Miya, was the women's division chief of Towada Chapter. The couple had joined the Gakkai eight years earlier, in 1954, and exerted themselves earnestly in faith, taking on leadership among the Osarizawa members.

When Yamao entered the union office, he found all the union officers seated before him, glaring at him with stern, threatening expressions.

The interrogation began. Yamao had been called before the union's disciplinary committee. He knew that union officials were perturbed by the election results and were out to get him. They viewed the Soka Gakkai with antagonism, he had heard, because the Komei candidate Seki had garnered 305 votes in Osarizawa.

But the officials never mentioned the elections. The pretext they used to attack and question him was his party affiliation as a town assembly representative.

Three years earlier, Yamao had run as a Soka Gakkai-backed candidate in the town assembly elections. Because he was a union member, the union had also supported him. Afterward, when local assembly representatives linked to the miners union formed a political alliance, the union had urged Yamao to join the Socialist Party, which it

supported. The union now claimed that Yamao's refusal had disrupted union solidarity.

An official of the Federation of Metal Miners Unions seated cross-legged on a desk at the front of the room told Yamao in a threatening tone, "If you aren't going to follow the union, get out!"

On July 5, just one day before, another miner and fellow Soka Gakkai member, Shiro Hongo, had been called before the same committee. Hongo had previously been fined for an infringement of the election law in the 1956 Upper House election. While campaigning for Seki in that election, he had engaged in door-to-door canvassing for votes, which is illegal in Japan. Because of this misdemeanor, the union had intended to discipline him for supposedly giving it a bad name. But instead the union had pressured him, offering to overlook the offense if he would sign a pledge promising to quit the Soka Gakkai.

Hongo had just joined the Gakkai at the time, and given the circumstances he agreed to sign. But afterward he had been impressed by the sincerity of other Soka Gakkai members and directly experienced the greatness of Buddhist practice. Thus he had decided not to quit after all. The union officials now accused him of breaking his promise and demanded to know why he hadn't left the Soka Gakkai.

Every individual has the right to his or her religious belief, though, and any attempt to infringe on that by the union would have been a serious violation of the law. Moreover, in the cases of both Yamao and Hongo, the incidents the union was calling into question had occurred quite some time ago. Only after the recent elections had these incidents suddenly become issues to be addressed by the union's disciplinary committee.

The union leaders feared that if they cited the Soka Gakkai members' lack of support for union-backed candidates as the reason for questioning Yamao and Hongo, they would be accused of violating the two men's religious and political freedoms. So they sought to expel Yamao and Hongo using other pretenses.

When Yamao returned from the union office, Miya asked in a worried tone, "What did the union say?"

He told her, his innately warm Akita dialect brimming with unconcealed anger: "Today all they asked was why I didn't join the Socialist Party. But they said if I don't follow the union, I'll have to quit it. What they really want is to get me fired. The truth is that they want to persecute me because Soka Gakkai members didn't support the union's candidate during the last election."

The Osarizawa mine was a union shop, which meant that only union members could work there; the mining company could no longer employ someone removed from the union rolls and stripped of union membership. Originally, the union shop system was conceived to create solidarity among workers and give them more power in negotiating with their employers, but now the union was turning against its workers — using the system to threaten Soka Gakkai members with the loss of their jobs.

While in addition to his work at the mine Yamao served as a town assembly representative, the remuneration for the latter was negligible. If he were laid off, he and his family would be out on the streets.

When Miya, a spirited woman, heard his story, she was angry, too. "We haven't done anything wrong," she said. "I dare them to fire you! This is what we've always expected might happen. 'As practice progresses and understanding grows, the three obstacles and four devils emerge, vying with one another to interfere....' (*The Major Writings of Nichiren Daishonin*, vol. 1, p. 145). We won't be beaten by such a little thing!"

Miya's words were the greatest encouragement Hisaya could have hoped for. Nodding in agreement, he said, as if to cement his resolve: "They think that if they fire me, they'll

strike fear into the hearts of all the Gakkai members working at the mine and force them to give up their faith. How ridiculous! When President Yamamoto came to Sendai⁴ in May, he said that progress in kosen-rufu has always stirred up obstacles and persecutions. This is a sign that our faith has finally matured.”

Shin'ichi had attended the May 8 Tohoku Headquarters Leaders Meeting at the Sendai Leisure Center, where he had shared a poem by President Toda:

*As you make your ascent
Of a still steeper mountain,
Set your mind firmly
On the journey for kosen-rufu.*

Shin'ichi had explained that difficulties and obstacles always arise on the path of kosen-rufu. He knew that as the Soka Gakkai became more involved in social reform and increased its influence, the winds of persecution would blow ever stronger.

And he thought members needed to be prepared. That premonition had now come true.

Since joining the Soka Gakkai in 1954, Hisaya and Miya had devoted themselves sincerely and steadily to faith. And in doing so, they had personally experienced the power of the Gohonzon.

In a work accident, Hisaya had narrowly escaped death. Filled with joy and gratitude for the protection faith had accorded them, the couple worked eagerly to spread the Daishonin's Buddhism.

Hisaya's fellow workers at Osarizawa each had their troubles and worries. There were people who suffered from ill health, who were parents of children with disabilities, whose home lives were unhappy and full of discord. There were those who drank and gambled away their pay, reducing their families to poverty. Such problems could not be solved simply by campaigning through union activities for improved working conditions or workers' living standards.

The Yamaos decided to make bringing happiness to their friends and coworkers their mission in life, and in their apartment in a six-unit row house, they started holding frequent gatherings, which they called Life Improvement Discussion Meetings. They chose that name because they knew that if their anguished friends could hear Gakkai members relate their experiences, they would realize how wonderfully faith had improved their lives.

Hisaya cared greatly for the Osarizawa mine, as he did for all his coworkers. Through earnest dialogue and genuine concern for their welfare, Hisaya and Miya gradually inspired more and more friends and neighbors to take faith in the Daishonin's Buddhism. By 1962, there were some 120 to 130 households practicing in Osarizawa. The flame of faith that had spread so vigorously and strongly was now being buffeted by a harsh gale of persecution.

News of the union's harassment of Gakkai members was quickly reported to the Soka Gakkai Headquarters in Tokyo. Shin'ichi said to the directors: "Hisaya Yamao in Osarizawa is the husband of Miya Yamao, women's division chief of Akita's Towada Chapter, isn't he? I remember him well.

"What is the union trying to say Yamao and Hongo have done wrong? It's extremely serious to strike someone from the union rolls and take away someone's job. If we allow the union to get away with such an outrage, it will put our fellow members in an intolerable position.

"I want to see the Soka Gakkai Headquarters send a top leader to fully support the

Osarizawa members. We have to protect our precious members. What is essentially at stake here is the most fundamental of human rights — the freedom of religion. This is an extremely grave matter.” There was anger in Shin’ichi’s voice.

The directors immediately contacted local leaders and asked them to go to Osarizawa with one of the Gakkai’s Public Relations Bureau staff and begin investigating the matter so that the Gakkai could decide what countermeasures to take.

Towada Chapter Chief Tatsuo Shimazu and other leaders in the area accompanied the staff member to Osarizawa. First, they met with two union leaders at the union office to inquire why Yamao and Hongo had been brought before the union’s disciplinary committee. It was then that one of the union officials let the truth slip out: “Well, of course, it was because of the recent elections,” he said.

So it was true. The reason that Yamao and Hongo had been singled out for disciplinary action was that they had supported Seki in the recent Upper House election.

Cutting in quickly, another union leader said: “It wasn’t just the elections. There were other problems, too. But the disciplinary committee hasn’t reached its decision yet, so we can’t really discuss it any further at this point.”

The union officials clearly wanted to bring the meeting to an end as quickly as possible. It had already been decided that the committee’s decision on the Yamao and Hongo cases would be announced at a special union meeting on Aug. 29.

Four days before that meeting, Hiroshi Yamagiwa and two other directors from the Soka Gakkai Headquarters, together with Towada Chapter Chief Shimazu, met again with union representatives. When they asked once more why Yamao and Hongo were being brought before the disciplinary committee, the union representatives then stated clearly that it was because they had refused to follow the union’s voting directive and had engaged instead in Komei campaign activities.

Apparently the union leaders had decided to change their strategy, since one of them had let their true motive slip out. They stressed that this had nothing to do with religion and declared that, while individuals were, of course, free to vote for whomever they pleased, the union took exception to its members disobeying union directives and participating in campaigns for candidates other than those the union supported.

To confirm that he had properly understood the union’s position, one Soka Gakkai director said: “In other words, even though the constitution guarantees all Japanese citizens the right to engage in political activities supporting the candidates of their choice, you will discipline any union member who does not follow union directives in this regard.”

The union leader replied: “It’s impossible for us to control how people vote at the ballot box. But we will discipline anyone who engages in campaign activities for candidates other than those the union has decided to support.”

And he added in an aggressive tone: “The union has rules. Those who choose not to follow them should go work somewhere else.”

(To be continued)

1. Located in the northwestern part of Japan’s main island, Honshu.
2. Region encompassing the northeastern part of Honshu.
3. City located some distance south of the famous Lake Towada, Akita Prefecture, northern Japan.
4. Largest city in the Tohoku region.

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