

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

Translation of parts 25–29 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 Osarizawa labor union leaders contradicted themselves. While they claimed that religion wasn’t the issue, they had forced Shiro Hongo to sign a pledge that he would quit the Soka Gakkai and were now making an issue out of his failure to obey that pledge.

Whatever the union was going to decide, the constitution guaranteed each individual freedom of religion and freedom to engage in political activities. Every Japanese citizen enjoyed these fundamental rights.

The action that the union was considering against Hisaya Yamao and Hongo violated not only the constitution but also the article whose inclusion, under Japan’s Labor Union Law, was compulsory in every union’s bylaws. It stated plainly: “No person, under any circumstances, shall be disqualified from union membership on the basis of race, religion, sex, birth or social status.”

On Aug. 29, the special meeting of the union was held. At this meeting the fates of Yamao and Hongo were to be decided.

However, the two men at the center of this controversy were informed of the meeting only two hours before it was scheduled to begin, with the message that if they wished to speak in their own defense, they would have to attend. Neither in the end attended, and in their absence a resolution was passed to strike their names from the union rolls in accord with the disciplinary committee’s recommendations.

That meant, of course, that both men’s employment at the mine would be terminated. This unjust action, which completely disregarded their basic human rights, was totally indefensible in a nation of laws and democracy such as Japan.

The following day, Aug. 30, Yamao and Hongo filed a petition in the Odate Branch of the Akita District Court requesting a temporary injunction against the union’s decision to expel them. This would halt their expulsion from the union and termination of employment and thus spare them from the drastic consequences those measures would spell for their families and livelihoods.

On Aug. 31, Yamao and Hongo were called once more to the union office. There, they were met by all the union’s executive officers, who glared at them menacingly. The union chief held their expulsion papers in hand and said to them with a cold smirk: “It was decided at the union meeting, so I’m giving you your expulsion papers. You didn’t show up to speak on your own behalf, which means that you forfeited your right to do so, and so we decided without you.”

It was an intentionally callous, cruel remark. Yamao was incensed. His clenched fists shook with rage. But he accepted the paper, making a tremendous effort to remind himself that he would win in the end. On it was simply written: “This is to inform you that at the 54th special meeting of the Osarizawa Miners Union held on Aug. 29, 1962, it was decided that, in accord with the recommendation of the disciplinary committee, you be expelled from the union.” The document stated no reason for the action taken.

The union pressed the mining company to immediately terminate Yamao’s and Hongo’s employment, since the mining operation was a union shop and the two were no longer

members. They even went so far as to declare that if the mining company failed to do so, the union would call a strike.

On the afternoon of Sept. 5, the company's management summoned the two and told them that their employment was terminated. And since they were no longer employed at the mine, they would also have to leave the company housing units in which they lived.

The Yamaos' and Hongos' neighbors stopped talking to them. When Miya Yamao went to the public bath, all the women abruptly turned away, refusing to look her in the eye. When she walked through the town, they would whisper among themselves: "Look, there goes Yamao's wife, the Soka Gakkai member."

The Yamaos endured these slights, and then one day, Miya's mother, who lived with them, said quietly, "Maybe we should leave Osarizawa and go somewhere else...."

In Osarizawa, the mine was the sole employer, but there was plenty of work to be had elsewhere. Miya understood the pain that had prompted her mother to suggest leaving their hometown — she understood it all too well. But she shook her head vigorously and replied: "Never! If we go, what will happen to our fellow members we leave behind? We'd be leaving them in a terrible spot. We aren't going anywhere."

After having Yamao and Hongo dismissed, the union began to closely watch the other Soka Gakkai members at the mine. Using all sorts of underhanded means, the union applied steady pressure, slowly tightening the noose.

The small number of Gakkai members in Osarizawa began to waver in their faith. So Towada Chapter Chief Tatsuo Shimazu and other local leaders joined forces to encourage, support and guide the members there. In response, the Osarizawa members rose up with the resolve to challenge the harsh oppression confronting them. They told one another: "We beat the 'king of unions' in Yubari! There's no reason why we can't do the same here."

They were recalling the Yubari Coal Miners Union incident, involving union oppression against Soka Gakkai members in the town of Yubari, Hokkaido, some five years earlier. In 1957, the Japanese Coal Miners Union, so powerful and influential that none dared oppose it, had adopted an anti-Soka Gakkai policy, and the affiliated union at the Yubari Coal Mine — Hokkaido's largest coal miners union — had begun to expel and exclude Soka Gakkai members. The union leaders' reasoning was the same as in Osarizawa: that by supporting Gakkai-backed candidates in the 1956 elections, Soka Gakkai members who belonged to the union had disrupted union solidarity.

The pressure that the Yubari Coal Miners Union had placed on the Soka Gakkai members clearly violated their freedom of religion guaranteed by the constitution. And the Soka Gakkai fought doggedly against this infringement of human rights.

President Toda sent Shin'ichi Yamamoto, then youth division chief of staff, to Hokkaido to solve the problem and encourage the members. Shin'ichi traveled throughout Hokkaido in defense of human rights and his fellow members. In the end, the Yubari Coal Miners Union completely rescinded its policy against Soka Gakkai members.

That victory at Yubari, a momentous chapter in the history of the Gakkai's grass-roots movement, inspired and filled the Osarizawa members with courage and hope. All of them — including Yamao and Hongo, who had been stripped of their union membership and lost their jobs — firmly believed that they eventually would win.

Yamao was indignant at the moral wrong that had been dealt him. If this terrible injustice and blatant violation of rights were to go unchallenged, he felt, reason and justice would be placed at risk in Japan. The expulsion from the union had to be rescinded — not for his sake, but for the sake of all Soka Gakkai members.

The petition for a temporary injunction against the union's decision, which Yamao and

Hongo had filed with the Akita District Court, was accepted, thus bringing their struggle into the halls of justice. During the hearing, it became clear that the two sides' interpretations of religious freedom were completely at odds. According to the union, freedom of religion existed only to the degree that it did not interfere with union solidarity, and union regulations and discipline superseded the right to freedom of religion as guaranteed in the constitution.

After the third session of hearings, Oct. 18, the court advised that the union rescind its expulsion order and that both parties try to arrive at an amiable settlement. The union accepted this, having realized that it stood little chance of winning an actual trial.

Yamao and Hongo were satisfied. They had only been interested in getting the expulsion lifted and had no particular wish to engage in a legal battle. They agreed to settle peaceably.

Later, there was some dispute over the settlement terms, but in the end the union decided at a special Dec. 20 meeting to rescind its expulsions of the two. This was only right and reasonable, but because the union had refused to accept this fact, Yamao and Hongo had undergone half a year of terrible hardship and humiliation.

In the end, they won. That the union had been forced to completely reverse its stand had been an unprecedented development. An atmosphere of victory prevailed among the Osarizawa members.

At about the same time as the Osarizawa events, a similar incident took place in the city of Sasebo, Nagasaki Prefecture, in the northwest corner of Kyushu, Japan's southernmost major island. The site of this particular controversy was the Nakazato Mine, located in a hilly area along both sides of the Ainouragawa river, northwest of central Sasebo.

Here, as well, two members, Tsunezo Yoshiyama and Goro Kida of the Gakkai's Sasebo Chapter, who belonged to the local coal miners union, had supported a Komei candidate instead of the union-endorsed candidate in the Upper House election. And in retaliation, the union had expelled them. The "support" for which they were condemned consisted of pasting up a single poster for the Komei candidate, Katsuharu Oniyama, at a local fish shop.

Beginning in late July, the two were summoned repeatedly to the union office for questioning. Then, on Aug. 4, a month after the elections, the issue of their expulsion from the Nakazato Coal Miners Union was raised at a special union meeting. The decision to expel was to be made by a vote by all union members, but union officers stood in a line to glare at each person as he walked up to mark his ballot at the voting table. This scare tactic was hardly conducive to a fair ballot based on individual conscience and free will, and so both Yoshiyama and Kida were expelled — by an overwhelming majority. The union's actions in this case, too, were inexcusable.

The Nakazato Mine was also a union shop, and Yoshiyama's and Kida's removal from the union rolls made it certain that they would be dismissed from their jobs. So on Aug. 10, the two men filed a petition in the Sasebo Branch of the Nagasaki District Court, requesting a temporary injunction against the union's expulsion order. The Soka Gakkai sent leaders to Sasebo to offer advice to the two, to negotiate with the union, and to support and encourage local members.

On Aug. 13, Yoshiyama and Kida's petition was granted by the court. The decision had been speedy; for the time being, at least, the two remained union members, in no danger of being driven from their jobs.

That same day, Eisuke Akizuki, youth division chief and a Soka Gakkai director, traveled to Sasebo to speak to members at a meeting held to protest the union's unjust

actions in the Sasebo Municipal Auditorium. All those who attended were deeply determined to fight this flagrant violation of human rights.

When it was announced that the petition filed by Yoshiyama and Kida had been granted, the auditorium exploded with cheers and applause. The confidence that justice would surely prevail spread through the room, filling everyone's heart.

But the problem was not to be solved so easily. Unbelievably underhanded plots awaited the two as they headed back to work in the mines.

Toward the end of September, Kida was suddenly fired. And the reason cited had nothing to do with his union problems.

At 40, Kida was a hard worker and in his prime, but about a year earlier he had broken his leg on the job. Because he had to make regular visits to the hospital for physical therapy, he was frequently absent from work. Stating that he had been neglecting his duties, the mining company now used this as a pretext to fire him.

As for Yoshiyama, shortly after the court granted his petition, the mining company removed him from mining work, transferring him to what turned out to be a janitorial position. The change brought with it a one-third reduction in pay.

This placed the 36-year-old Yoshiyama, who had a wife and four young children to support, in a difficult position. He applied for assistance to the district welfare commissioner, who in Japan, though officially appointed, works on a volunteer basis. Employed full-time at the mine himself and a member of the miners union, the commissioner refused to help Yoshiyama on the grounds that it would be damaging to the company's reputation. Though Yoshiyama asked to be transferred back to his previous job, and though the mine was actually short of mine workers, his request was turned down.

Hard as all this was to bear, he could have endured it if the pressure had only been at work. But when he saw that his neighbors refused to let their children play with his, or when his children came home picked on and bullied by others, it broke his heart. "Why do they have to take it out on the kids!?" he cried out in exasperation and rage. But there was nothing he could do except put up with it.

The high spirits of his wife, Yoshie, though, had been a great source of encouragement. When the union had begun interrogating him, she had resolutely told him: "You don't have to apologize for anything. You haven't done anything wrong!" Her confident words had helped him bear the unjust actions of the union and resolve to keep fighting until he won.

Both Nakazato's Yoshie Yoshiyama and Osarizawa's Miya Yamao were brave women who never lost their cheerfulness in spite of the hardships they faced. Their support is what made it possible for their husbands to keep fighting. If they had complained about their situation, their husbands surely would have wavered.

Mr. Yoshiyama always pursued life with a wholehearted commitment, and when things got really tough, he would chant daimoku with great earnestness and read the Gosho with a passion. His favorite passage was "Though one might point at the earth and miss it, though one might bind up the sky, though the tides might cease to ebb and flow and the sun rise up from the west, it could never come about that the prayers of the practitioner of the Lotus Sutra would go unanswered" (*The Major Writings of Nichiren Daishonin*, vol. 7, p. 46). The study movement launched by Shin'ichi had inspired unwavering faith in the hearts of Soka Gakkai members like Yoshiyama.

(To be continued)