

AN ESSAY BY SGI PRESIDENT IKEDA CHANGE THE TIMES!

Remembering the Yubari Coal Miner's Union Incident and the formation of the student division, SGI President Ikeda says that 'we must fight to change the times, to usher in an age in which treacherous individuals cannot arrogantly savor triumph.'

*Courage yet, my brother or my sister!
Keep on — Liberty is to be subserv'd whatever occurs;
That is nothing that is quell'd by one or two failures, or any number of failures,
Or by the indifference or ingratitude of the people, or by any unfaithfulness,
Or the show of the tushes of power, soldiers, cannon, penal statutes.*

I am fond of the *Leaves of Grass* poem by Walt Whitman, "To a Foil'd European Revolutionaire," which begins with the stanza above.

In June 1957, an incident occurred in Yubari, a coal-mining town in Hokkaido. In the nationwide Upper House elections held in July 1956, the Soka Gakkai members among the Yubari Coal Mine workers voted for the candidate endorsed by the Soka Gakkai instead of the candidate endorsed by the Coal Miner's Union. This caused the union to accuse the Gakkai members in its ranks of disrupting union solidarity and to take measures to shut them out. The union leadership decided to openly have a confrontation with the Soka Gakkai.

This was the Yubari Coal Miner's Union Incident.

At that time, the union wielded such enormous power over the lives of its members that many felt it futile to try to resist its demands.

Prior to the incident, several miners who were Soka Gakkai members had been called to the union offices and told to either give up their faith or face expulsion from the union. Being expelled meant simultaneous dismissal from the coal mine. They were being treated as outcasts simply because they belonged to the Soka Gakkai.

Their wives and even their children were ostracized. Defamatory posters were pasted up on electric poles and the walls of homes, and attacks and criticisms of the Soka Gakkai and its members were broadcast on the radio.

In a strange perversion of the union's role as protector of workers' rights, it became a violator of their rights, in particular their right to freedom of religious belief. The union acted in an underhanded, unacceptable manner. We of the Soka Gakkai were outraged by the union's actions, and we rose up to protect our fellow members and win in this struggle.

On June 28, 1957, a young lion flew to Hokkaido. This was only nine months before President Toda's death. My mentor had already grown frail, and I was acting in his place, manning the helm and taking full responsibility for the Soka Gakkai. As such, I stood at the forefront of the people's struggle for human rights.

If the established powers were going to unjustly oppress the people, then we would rise up under the banner of justice to defend them. We would fight with undying courage!

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In Yubari, I visited the homes of our members, who were bravely devoting themselves to their Buddhist practice, and encouraged them: “Let’s fight together! We must not lose!”

In the midst of all this, on June 30, the student division’s inaugural meeting was held at the Azabu Civic Hall in Tokyo. On that morning, I sent a telegram to be read at the meeting. I thought of the students, their faces brimming with joy and a fresh pledge for *kosen-rufu*. My message read: “Congratulations on the inaugural meeting of the student division, a gathering of talented young men and women who will shoulder the next century! Under President Toda’s leadership, please embark on your journey in high spirits.”

Mr. Toda was overjoyed at the establishment of the student division, which was to be the last division he formed during his lifetime. He had high hopes for the bright future of the student division members, urging half of them to become company directors and the other half to earn doctorates. He earnestly hoped that they would become the compassionate, wise leaders of a new age, leaders who would fight for and protect the people.

This revolution of leadership, this revolution of society’s elite, is the student division’s eternal, unchanging mission.

How lamentably vast are the numbers of “talented animals,” as the Daishonin would call them — people who are obsessed only with gaining personal honor and distinction, who despise and trample on others! And how many are the young people who seek only fleeting pleasures, who lose themselves in empty amusements, who waste this precious never-to-come-again time for building valuable, meaningful lives!

What good is intelligence if you refuse to fight against injustice? What good is learning if you don’t protect the people? What good is youth if you don’t use it to strengthen and forge yourself as a human being?

Cuban freedom fighter José Martí declared that our abilities are for the people, who draw those abilities forth and allow them to be developed. If we do not use them to serve the people, he asserted, our abilities have no meaning. Not using them for that purpose is shameful.

Confident that the student division members would follow in my footsteps, I denounced the actions of the Coal Miner’s Union at two Soka Gakkai protest rallies held in Hokkaido, resolutely proclaiming, “The Soka Gakkai is the tide, and its roar is the roar of a lion king!”

Eventually the Coal Miner’s Union was forced to back down from its attempts to exclude Soka Gakkai members. The true unity and courageous demands of the people crushed the arrogant attempts of those in power to oppress them.

Nichiren Daishonin writes, “The rulers and people who despised the votaries of the Lotus Sutra seemed to be free from punishment at first, but eventually they were doomed to fall” (*The Major Writings of Nichiren Daishonin*, vol. 1, p. 241). This is our conviction and an unwavering truth of Buddhism.

In time, the powerful Coal Miner’s Union declined and disappeared from society’s stage.

It was in the midst of this intense struggle that the Osaka Prefectural Police Headquarters summoned me for questioning. Several Gakkai members had been accused of violating the election law during the campaign for an Upper House by-election in the Osaka electoral district held that April. They demanded my appearance as the person in

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charge of the Soka Gakkai's campaign activities in that election.

It goes without saying that what was behind all this was the political establishment's fear of the Soka Gakkai as a new popular movement dedicated to the rights of the people. This marked the first full-fledged attempt to try to destroy our organization.

The newly formed student division sailed out bravely onto these troubled waters and rang the bell heralding the start of a new era.

The Daishonin writes, "I pray that my followers will be lion kings, above the mocking taunts of packs of foxes" (*Gosho Zenshu*, p. 1589). We must fight to change the times, to usher in an age in which treacherous individuals cannot arrogantly savor triumph. We must make it an age in which the people, the true heroes, can joyfully sing a brilliant paean of victory, of happy, fulfilled lives.

To do that, we must fear nothing, falter at nothing, persevere with patience and fight with determination!

The morning of July 3, I flew from Hokkaido to Osaka, where I voluntarily presented myself for police questioning. It was there, accused of a crime of which I was completely innocent, that I would be imprisoned. That was the Osaka Incident.

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