

**THE NEW HUMAN REVOLUTION**  
**'AT THE HELM'**  
**VOLUME 7, CHAPTER 4, PARTS 1-2**

*The 'At the Helm' chapter begins with the noble efforts of a chapter leader to care for and encourage 900 members trapped on a train in a blizzard.*

The blizzard buffeted the train's windows like an onslaught of white demons appearing from the darkness. Exhaustion etched the faces of the passengers on that night, Jan. 24, 1963. Though they were hungry, all they could do was sit and wait. The train showed no sign of moving.

Sixteen or 17 hours had already passed since the train stopped at Miyauchi Station in Niigata Prefecture [in central Honshu, Japan's main island]. It had been chartered to carry some 900 members of the Soka Gakkai's Niigata and Uetsu chapters back home after their visit to the Nichiren Shoshu head temple in Fujinomiya City, Shizuoka Prefecture. The group had left the head temple at about 3:00 p.m. on Jan. 23. At around 8:00 p.m., at Ueno Station in Tokyo, they had boarded the chartered train that would take them to Niigata.

At Ueno there was an announcement that trains were experiencing major delays due to heavy snow to the north, but the group's train nevertheless made its way smoothly for a while. They were scheduled to arrive at their destination, Niigata Station, on the morning of Jan. 24.

Just when most passengers had drifted off to sleep, the train stopped at Koide Station on the Joetsu Line, a small station seven stops before Nagaoka, a city in central Niigata Prefecture. This was still a considerable distance from Niigata City. When the train didn't move for some time, everyone began to grow concerned. Many of the members on board had to be at work the next morning.

After an hour, to the passengers' great relief, the train lurched forward with a loud clunk and began moving again. But it proceeded at a laboriously slow pace. An hour later it stopped again—at Miyauchi Station, one stop before Nagaoka. It was 3:30 in the morning, and outside a fierce blizzard raged. The passengers waited and waited, but the train just sat on the tracks, motionless.

Niigata Chapter Leader Kinji Eda, who was responsible for the group's transportation, went to the stationmaster's office with the young men's division member in charge of the Traffic Control Group. The stationmaster told them that heavy snow had blocked trains at several points on the Hokuriku, Joetsu and Shin'etsu lines, and that there was no telling when normal operations would resume.

Eda asked the stationmaster if he could arrange some meals for the passengers and, if it looked like the delay would be a long one, find lodging for the elderly and those with small children. Though the stationmaster said he would organize some boxed meals, all the lodgings in the area were full. Eda then assembled the leaders responsible for each car and explained the situation. He urged them to work closely and in unity to address any problems that might arise, thus ensuring that the return trip from their pilgrimage would end without any accidents.

When morning came, Eda suggested that the members use the public telephones in and around the station to call their families and places of work to let them know where they were and what was happening. They all did gongyo together on the train, and then the

boxed meals that had been arranged by the stationmaster arrived. After doing gongyo and eating, everyone felt much better.

To the members' enthusiastic response, Eda proposed that Goshō study sessions be conducted in each car. "Why, I feel as if I were at a summer training course, being able to study the Goshō from early in the morning!" "I think winter training course is the term you are looking for! But if it's really a training course, we're looking at three days and two nights!" Everyone bantered cheerfully.

The snow showed no signs of letting up. It buried all the houses within view.

More boxed meals were distributed at lunchtime, but they would be the last. The heavy snows had disrupted all transportation, cutting off deliveries of food and other supplies. The stationmaster later managed to find some pastries for them, but these were quite stale—some of the jam and other fillings had already spoiled. There was really nothing more he could do.

Eda was determined at all costs to ensure that the members would not go hungry. He phoned Masashi Takekawa, the leader of Nagaoka Chapter, which covered the area around Nagaoka and neighboring Miyauchi, where the train was stranded. Eda asked Takekawa, knowing what an imposition it was, if he could somehow arrange to have food delivered to the members. Preparing meals for some 900 members was not something one could do at a moment's notice. But without hesitation, Takekawa said he would.

The blizzard grew fiercer. Later it was known as the Blizzard of '63. It caused record damage in the Hokuriku and Shin'etsu regions [central northeastern Honshu], including Niigata Prefecture. According to a report compiled by the Niigata Prefecture Storm Damage Task Force on Jan. 30, some 37 inches of snow fell in Nagaoka City and 56 inches in Irihiro Village on Jan. 25. The snow kept falling, and by Jan. 30, it had reached a height of 148 inches at Nagaoka Station and a staggering 204 inches at Irihiro Station.

By the evening of Jan. 23, 144 trains in Niigata Prefecture were canceled, and 26 were stranded in the snow. By Jan. 30, nine people were dead in the prefecture, and one was missing. Ninety-eight homes and buildings were completely destroyed and another 95 heavily damaged. Snow-blocked rivers and frozen water pipes had flooded 193 homes and offices. Not only were crops severely damaged, but the disruption of transportation caused great loss to businesses.

Daisaku Ikeda appears in the  
novel as Shin'ichi Yamamoto.  
The events take place in 1963.