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Shin'ichi Yamamoto shares the story of Ishimatsu Yoshida, 'The Count of Monte Cristo of the Showa Era,' who was unjustly imprisoned for a murder that he did not commit.

Having decided to attend the regional Komei-kai meetings, Shin'ichi Yamamoto began to organize the points he would emphasize. First, he thought he should confirm the fundamental spirit of the Komei-kai.

As he had often discussed with the Komei-kai members, the established political parties in Japan gave priority to protecting the interests of big business or the labor unions and ignored the people's welfare. The Komei-kai had been formed to put an end to the biased practices of the existing political parties and to realize a government benefiting all citizens equally and contributing to their happiness and welfare. Shin'ichi felt it crucial that he state unequivocally that neither the Komei Political Federation nor the Komei-kai were created with the narrow-minded goal of enabling the Soka Gakkai to take control of the Japanese government.

Shin'ichi's second point concerned the fact that, although it had effectively become the third-largest force in the Upper House, the Komei-kai was still a minority. In order to carry out its programs in the political world, the Komei-kai would most likely have to cooperate with other political parties on occasion.

From a certain perspective, politics was a realm where you could not function without compromise. Shin'ichi wanted to clarify in no uncertain terms that when it came to the practical operations of the Komei-kai, the Soka Gakkai, its main supporting body, would distance itself. It would leave the parliamentary group to act as it saw fit to achieve its goals.

His third point was Mr. Toda's instruction to keep a careful eye on government. To achieve world peace and happiness for the people, the Soka Gakkai needed to maintain a close watch on the activities of all political parties in Japan—and the Komei-kai was no exception. Shin'ichi also thought he should make it clear that the Soka Gakkai would vigorously denounce any Komei-kai representative who behaved in a corrupt, self-serving manner and who, forgetting the aims and ideals on which the group was founded, provoked some scandal.

At each of the regional Komei-kai meetings, Shin'ichi based his speech on these three points. On March 3, he attended the Nagoya Komei-kai meeting in the city's Kanayama Gymnasium. He began by voicing his hope that the Komei-kai would be a parliamentary group dedicated to protecting the interests of ordinary citizens. Then he spoke about the case of Ishimatsu Yoshida, who had been dubbed "The Count of Monte Cristo of the Showa Era."

Just a few days earlier, on Feb. 28, the Nagoya High Court declared Yoshida innocent of a crime that he was falsely accused of committing some five decades earlier. Yoshida was arrested by police as the principal perpetrator in the robbery and murder of a farmer in the Nowa area of Chikusacho, Aichi County (present-day Imaiike, Chikusa Ward, Nagoya City), on Aug. 13, 1913.

Yoshida's arrest came about after two men who worked in a glass factory were taken into custody following a police investigation of the crime. These men gave statements to the police claiming that Yoshida, who worked at another glass factory, had committed the murder. He was then arrested.

The 34-year-old Yoshida knew nothing about the crime, and his arrest came as a total shock. The police tortured him mercilessly during questioning—he was stripped, kicked and beaten. When he went unconscious, they doused him with water.

But all through the police questioning and the trial, Yoshida maintained his innocence. The courts, however, accepted the word of his two accusers, and in April 1914, he was convicted of first-degree murder by the Nagoya District Court and sentenced to death. The other two men were convicted as accomplices and given life sentences.

Naturally, Yoshida appealed. But in July that year, the Nagoya Court of Appeals simply commuted his death sentence to life imprisonment.

A further appeal to the Supreme Court, his last hope, was rejected in November that year, and his life sentence was rendered irrevocable. But Yoshida continued to declare his innocence in prison, and for a time he refused to wear a prison uniform or perform prison labor.

Whenever he encountered the two men who had accused him of being the perpetrator, he would tussle with them. And each time, he was punished.

Yoshida was a kind man, who adored his mother. As long as she lived, he continued to send her money from prison. Having her see him in handcuffs when she visited pained him to no end.

Yoshida petitioned twice for a retrial, but he was rejected both times. Intent on clearing his name, he decided to leave a complete record of the events. To do so, he learned how to read and write in prison.

In March 1935, some 22 years after his arrest, Yoshida was released on parole. To prove his innocence, he began seeking ways to have his case retried. Several supporters—in the form of young journalists with a strong sense of justice—came to his aid.

During his original trial, the most important piece of evidence against him was the false testimony of his so-called accomplices. With the help of the young journalists, Yoshida managed to persuade the two men to acknowledge their testimony as false and write letters of apology to that effect. Yoshida felt he had at last glimpsed a ray of light.

In 1937, he petitioned a third time for a retrial. Seven years later, in 1944, the Supreme Court declared that the letters of apology were coerced, and Yoshida's petition was dismissed once again.

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