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- BLL National Convention -

BLL to Review Its Platform and Organization A Turning Point

The 51th National Convention of the BLL (Chairman, Mr. Saichiro Uesugi) was held at Kyushu Kosei Nenkin Hall in Kita-Kokura-ku, Kita-Kyushu, Fukuoka Pref. from March 2 to March 5. So far, BLL movement has achieved remarkable success in improving the inferior situations in the Buraku through administrative actions. On the other hand, the participants frankly admitted the negative fact that the basic policy of the BLL (Buraku Liberation is the target to achieve and enterprises are the means for it) has been reversed in order, resulting in such evils as a lack of principles and bossy control by the leaders. A new movement policy plan, including a fundamental revision of the form and organization is going to be developed.

Above all, a big change was shown in the move by the BLL to no longer rely on "Social Democratic Party oriented" support but to place higher regard to agreements with individual politicians who understand and support human rights issues. This would indeed, be a drastic turnover, since that the



organization has sent some Social Democratic Party members to the Diet.

Approximately fifteen hundred delegates participated in the National Convention. Guests included Fukuoka Pref.

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Governor Okuda and representatives from the Social Democratic Party, the Komeito, the Democratic Socialist Party, and the Japan New Party. Mr. Uesugi, the chairman of the BLL gave a speech, "The third phase of the Buraku Liberation Movement is in transition from creation to implementation. In this stage we must clarify what is full-fledged liberation and what conditions should be attained for it. The relevant problem is how we define the characteristics of our organization". He indicated that the revision of the Platform and Regulations was already underway.

As for the reason why the BLL gave basic support to the Hosokawa Coalition Government, he explained that that government had more possibilities for enacting the 'BLL of a Fundamental Law for Buraku Liberation' than the former government. Concerning the 'Social Democrats-oriented' support, he indicated that the fundamental formula of election struggle was to be revised. "We will decide to whom we give our recommendations and support, depending on the policy agreements between the individual politicians and ourselves, taking into consideration the cooperative relationships with respective parties".

Comment

The proposed plans for the new movement policy may be in line with their motto, 'The Age of Upheaval and Renovation -- Breaking through the Third Phase of Buraku Liberation Movement'. Yet they also mean that the BLL is going to drastically change its course: for example, the extensive support given to the Social

Democratic Party up to now is to be checked and the present Platform to be revised. Among the factors related to these changes are the fact that they will no longer demand the extension of the 'Law on Special Measures' which has been the core of the environmental improvement in Dowa districts, and the emergence of the Coalition Government after the collapse of the '55-political system. The Hosokawa Coalition Government was given high estimation by the BLL, especially on human rights issues, as it was hopefully thought to have more possibilities than the former government. 'Looking from the viewpoint of what we will have the Hosokawa Government do for us', they declared.

The present Platform, which was established in 1984, is firmly in line with the ideological point of view that the Buraku Liberation should realize through liberation struggles with the laborer class as the core.

On the other hand, taking into account international treaties on human rights, including the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, International Covenants on Human Rights, and the International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination, the proposed Platform is made up of a newly created liberation theory with the viewpoint that "Buraku liberation is a national task for all people". The draft will be prepared by September 1994 by the 'Sub-Committee for Reviewing Platform and Regulations' and will be adopted at the National Convention next year.

Getting rid of a dependency on the Law on Special Measures, and shifting the course to a wider range movement aiming for a



more independent liberation, is expected to elevate the image of the organization and to promote a joint struggle with neighboring communities outside the Buraku. "Some members or branches have mistakenly taken for granted the fact that the movement has been protected by the law for a quarter century ('Achievements and defects'). As this, however, is the general view held by most BLL members, it may be an urgent problem to change this viewpoint.

Just as we have our own life span, it can be said that any organization also has its own life span relevant to its role in society. If an organization is to endure it must sense the decrease of its energy, put up a new target, or regain the original starting point in order to overcome difficulties. In this

respect the BLL, which has been carrying out the Buraku Liberation Movement in earnest since the establishment of the National Suiheisha(National Leveler's Association), is now at a turning point as an organization of mass movements. The result of the National Convention will be watched with concern.

(Extracted from newspaper article, "Nihon Keizai Shinbun, Evening edition, dated March 2, 1994. Reporter:Yukio Noda)

Discriminatory Case (1)

Discriminatory Words Used by Taxi Driver of Taxi Company, Osaka

The beginning

Early this year, a discriminatory case involving a taxi driver came to light. The taxi driver was an employee of the Taxi Company in Osaka. Another taxi driver of the Taxi Company pointed out the discriminatory words. The case began with an altercation happened between the two drivers.

Outline of the case

In January 1994 a taxi driver of the

Taxi Company stopped his taxi in front of the Umeda Hankyu Department Store and a passenger got out. The driver noticing that the rear of his taxi was in a pedestrians' crossing, asked Mr. K., a driver of the Taxi Co. to move his taxi forward. Mr. K. moved his car accordingly but a few minutes later he got out of his car and said to the driver of the Taxi Co., "Why do I have to do anything you request ? You are ET TA , aren't you? ET TA should not talk big." The driver came up to Mr. K and said, "What do you mean?" Mr. K then went back to his car.



Mr. K (on the far right, his back toward the camera)

The taxi driver went closer to Mr. K's car and wrote down the license number. Seeing this, Mr. K reached out of his window tearing the paper and tried to escape. But, he was forced to stop at a red light. As a result, Mr. K was identified and subsequently through the Taxi Co. the Buraku Liberation League, Osaka Prefectural Federation received the claim.

On January 14, 1994 a fact-finding meeting was held at the Osaka Dowa Area General Welfare Center. Participants were Mr. K, the BLL Osaka Prefecture Federation, the Taxi Company, the Taxi Co., the Osaka Taxi Association, Administration. Mr. K admitted to everything and apologized.

At the fact-finding meeting Mr. K said, "By chatting with other drivers I come to know that the Taxi Company is related to DOWA. On the day this incident happened, I was irritated because of a lack of passengers. Under such circumstances I was ordered to move my car and I felt hot. After my discriminatory words, I became aware of my failure and tried to escape but the signal changed red and I could not escape." He also said, "Previously I worked at a store selling chickens in the Buraku

community and I have many friends from the Buraku community. I feel sorry for them. After this incident I read books about Dowa and I realized that my words are very important. I am very sorry." He apologized. Mr. K is from Miyazaki Prefecture and he came to Osaka 40 years ago. Until then he had no knowledge about the Buraku problem. He has worked for the Taxi Co. for half a year. He has worked for the Taxi Co. twice and has never received a lecture about the Dowa matter.

At the meeting the following facts came to light. In 1985 the Taxi Co. participated in the Entrepreneurs Liaison Association on the Dowa problem. The director of the company is a board member, but in 30 years they have never carried out a study course about Dowa in the company.

The BLL Osaka Prefectural Federation requested Mr. K and the Taxi Co. to submit their review by writing a consciousness-raising program for Dowa for use in the future and also requested the Osaka Taxi Association and the Kinki Transportation Bureau to submit their opinion about this incident.



Discriminatory Case (2)

Why So Long For An Apparent Solution?

-Buddhists Accused Of Inaction Regarding Derogatory Posthumous Names-

Memorial services to console the souls of Burakumin with discriminatory posthumous Buddhist names were held by two temples in Saga Prefecture, Kyushu. Four and a half years went by since the discovery of those posthumous names showing their origin of discriminated Burakumin status in communal cemeteries and temple death registers. Although the people concerned urged the responsible Buddhist sects to correct the wrong doing, no action was taken. The services were held, death registers rewritten and a tower of repose is to be erected. The matter seems to be ostensibly solved. Still, a question remains why it took so long as 4 2/1years? Why such a long time of inaction from priests, people of religious world, of the sects involved?

Solemn sutra chanting by priests clad in gorgeous clerical robes echos in the temple. An old lady, probably a descendant of the deceased, caresses a tombstone with a degrading name carved on it, murmuring in an undertone. With many concerned people watching, the old register books with derogatory names are sealed one after another for good by the priests.

Memorial services to denounce such posthumous names were observed on March 29 and April 12, with participation by people representing every local Buddhist sect, their head temples, the Buraku Liberation League, the Saga prefectural Government and many concerned local

groups.

The existence of these discriminatory names was made fully public in March 1993, when the Survey Group for the Actualities of the Buraku, jointly formed by the Saga prefectural Federation of the BLL and the Japan Social Democratic Party, announced and disclosed the fact that 22 names in cemeteries and 80 names among death registers in the temples were found to have derogatory characters included in them.

These discriminatory posthumous names were given to the deceased Burakumin in the period between 1740 and as late as 1871, the early Meiji era. The characters indicating the deceased persons to be Burakumin, such as "Kaku", meaning people engaged in hide and leather treatment - A typical Buraku occupation - or, "Boku", meaning slave, had been included in these names. In the early Meiji era, some of the involved families changed sect and were moved to other temple registers.

The very first discovery of these discriminatory names actually was in September 1989. The BLL and other concerned parties had urged all Buddhist sects involved to "find a solution voluntarily among themselves as the sole matter lies in discriminatory postures among you religious people". Discussions were held with the Prefecture of Saga and other local autonomies. Nevertheless, the Buddhists



had shown no remedies, and led to the disclosure of a year ago.

The explanation given by the Buddhist sects for taking more than four years to correct this wrong is as follows;

Some families converted to other sects in the early Meiji era. The sects which received these families did not consent to disclose the names of these families. Without their presence memorials are meaningless. So the temple of this sect refused to sit down to talk about how to observe the memorials. Also, the Burakus involved in this matter are not formally designated areas by law, etc., etc. A direct confrontation with the matter was not possible.

The head authority of the sects to which the families converted states; "It is not very clear who actually takes care of the cemetery. Also, the Buraku involved is not formally designated area and so most of the families hesitate to disclose their identities as Burakumin. We kept discussing with the temples concerned in our sect. We never left the matter ignored."

The whole situation started to change in June 1993, when about 90 Buddhist clearics in Saga and Fukuoka organized a group called the "Association to Reconsider Discriminatory Tombs and Posthumous Names." This is a group of religious people across every sect who voluntarily act to cope with the matter as a fundamental problem confronting religions, and they called for the two involved sects to join the Association for discussion.

One sect which originally gave degraded names consented to renew the register, observe memorials and hold study meetings of human rights in their sect. The other sect, the one the families converted to,

decided to hold a memorial of their own, refusng any contact with the BLL and the Association. Last autumn, they took the 21 tombs into their temple for some unknown reason. After the memorials the former sect made it clear it would hold human rights study meetings and continue to do so hereafter. However, the other sect says it has done all it has to do in Saga.

"Many Buddhist sects regard the matter of these discriminatory names as things of the past or as something happening in other sects and not their own. But the question is here and now as long as there are such facts and they are not given solutions. Holding a memorial for them is not the goal. I keep telling myself this is where things start," says the Priest in Kurume, Fukuoka, a member of the Association.

The priest of Yufuin, Oita Ptef., the Representative of the Association says; "Be aware afresh of the duty of religion. Making excuses by referring to un-designated areas or the difficulties of naming families for inaction is wrong. Doesn't every sect preach the equality of human beings? Why couldn't some Buddhist clerics hold the memorials particularly meant for this problem as the sacred books tell us?"

The doubt in the mind of the Priest Hino didn't go away, when he attended both memorials of these two sects. "Memorials were solemn and observed very formally following the tradition. The more magnificent the memorials were observed, the greater the gap with the fact that they took four and a half years just to come here. This is, in fact, scary for me," he says.