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JAPANESE WOMEN IN 1953

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Japanese women in 1953 experienced quite a full life, with so many events and problems. In the political field, they had the general election in April and participated in campaigns following them in and out of the Diet for the benefit of women and children, and the activities of women's organizations as pressure groups were even greater than they were in the previous years. Peace movement was also marked throughout the year. In the field of employment, we saw both the advancement and symptoms of retrogression concerning the employment opportunities of women. International activities have become more and more active, and we had so many interchanges of persons and informations with other countries of the world. Among the social problems, the one that attracted the attention of people most was the campaign against prostitution. The welfare measures for widows started this year. In education, the coeducation and equal opportunity for both sexes have begun to be re-examined. In culture, art, sports and others, it may be said women made much progress this year, with some outstanding honour even in the international level.

We shall describe the above-mentioned women's life a little more in details in the following.

1. Political Activities and Women's Organizations

At the election held in April, women showed their deep concern in politics by voting at the rate of 70 % for the House of Representatives and 59 % for the House of Councillors. Women who were elected to the posts of Diet members, were 9 in the House of Representatives and 9 in the House of Councillors (Now totaling 24 in the seats, including the 6 women members of the House of Councillors who continue to hold the posts for three years more). They constitute only 3 % of the total Diet members, and although it seems a small number yet, the activities of women Diet members were quite remarkable. Especially notable is

the return of Miss Fusae Ichikawa, the foremost leader of the pre-war suffrage movement and also of Mrs. Ichiko Kamichika, one of the foremost critics and forerunners for the emancipation of women. It seems they added a fresh energy to the women's activities in politics, and they were successful in forming a united body of Diet women irrespective of partisanship, and very often these Diet women and the leaders of women organizations cooperated with one another in their fight against or for some of the political issues. To mention some of their achievements, they contributed much to check the proposal by the Cabinet of reorganizing the Women's & Minors' Bureau of Labor Ministry to the effect of weakening it; they carried out nationwide campaign for promoting the government to submit to the Diet a bill for the prohibition of prostitution and setting up of a national committee for the study of this problem, concerning which a little more detailed explanations will be given afterward; they were successful also, in making of the "Jai alai" Bill in the Diet withdrawn for the reason that it would demoralize our society. And there have been many other issues for or against which women worked hard both inside and outside of the Diet, though the results were not always satisfactory.

Besides these political issues, women's civic organizations which count nearly 20,000 with membership of 7 million women, were active for many other issues. Before the election in April, many of the women's organizations participated in the so-called Fair-election Campaign in cooperation with the Youth organizations and strongly advocated the prevention of bribery, abstention, and also the reduction of the expense for the election to the officially recognized sum. It seems their activities had a considerable effects in cleansing the election. Among other activities of the women's organizations, the Women's Week Campaign (commemorating the woman suffrage) was observed by almost all the women's organizations including trade unions. The slogan for the 5th Women's Week was to develop the self-dependency of women, and during this

Women's Week, a National Women's Conference was held at Tokyo sponsored by the Women's & Minors' Bureau and the Asahi News Paper, and this conference attracted the attention of women in the whole country, being participated by 60 women selected from all over the country, also the move for the improvement of homelife is to be noticed, although it has been a favourite theme of women since the end of the War, and every year the women's organizations have been undertaking the programs of some kind of improvement of homelife, such as, the improvement of the old-style kitchens to a newer one, improvement of lavatories, improvement of clothings, food, and dwellings, doing away with the traditional undesirable practices, setting up cooperative endeavors for farm and home, introduction of good recreations to the daily life, etc. This home-improvement activities are mostly seen in the rural areas, and it seems that they have come to devise more and more practical means to improve their living in accordance with their economic standards. In towns, the House-wives' Federation fought as in the previous years, against the rise of price of rice, gass and electricity, and also against the waste of everything and promoted planned life. As for the organization itself, there were a tendency among women's organizations to federate this year, such as, the Federation of Women's Clubs was formed by the leftist women centering around the Democratic Women's Club, Federations of Minors Wives' Clubs formed as a kind of auxiliaries for the Minors' unions, and also the Federation of Regional Women's Organizations which was formed in 1952 including the local federations of 22 prefectures became very active this year. The Federation of Agricultural Cooperative Women was very active, too. Thus the power of the organized women is of great influence to the government as well as to the society.

2. Movement for Peace

Since the end of occupation, the movement for peace among women has become very active, and the characteristics of this movement is that it has been led

most actively by the leftist organizations, centering around the Democratic Women's Clubs, which is internationally affiliated to the International Democratic Women's Federation. As is mentioned above, the leftist women set up a federation called the Federation of Women's Clubs, affiliated by 23 organizations. They sent ten delegates to the Peace Conference held at Copenhagen in June, and they had women's national rallies twice in Tokyo, in June and December under the joint sponsor-ship of General Federation of Trade Unions and have been sponsoring meetings in cities and towns with the aim of spreading the idea of peace and anti-rearmament. At the same time we must not forget there are peace-movement by religious groups and non-leftists, but their voices are not so loud as those of others.

3. Employment

Women in employment as of September 1953 count 16,320,000, forming 41.5 % of total female population of 14 years old and over. Of these, paid female workers are over 4 millions against 10 million male workers, forming 25 % of total paid workers. So women workers, both paid and unpaid, are on increase year after year. Only, it should be noticed that their increase is most conspicuously seen in service industries, it was mostly in the groups of small-scaled owners and unpaid family workers. This reflects the economic status of Japan, and a vague impression that women's field of employment is being narrowed prevails among women. There were attempts this year, by some employers to regulate the age-limit for women workers much at lower level than that of men. There were also attempts to fire married women workers at the time of personnel cut. But this may be the results of women's tendency to stick to their posts and whether the field of employment for women will be narrowed or widened in the future may depend very much upon how far women would overcome difficulties and how far they would develop their own capacities and skills as workers, as well as upon the demand for women in the labor market.

Taking up individual cases, we see many advancement and promotion of women in occupational career this year. For example, the first female 2nd class wireless operator, first woman assistant professor at Kyoto State University, first certified woman flier, first woman movie director, first assistant police-inspector, etc. appeared. As for the appointed offices, Mrs. Nakayama, a liberal party member of Lower House was appointed Parliamentary Vice-minister of Welfare, and in the local cities and towns, when the new appointment of the Welfare Commissioners took place in autumn, many more women than before were appointed as such, constituting 20 % of the total number 123,000. We can add here also, the new appointment of about 820 counsellors for widows' families who take care of the newly started system of Loan for Widows and their Dependents.

Thus, women in employment saw both advancement and retrogressive tendency in the employment opportunities and women in the trade unions are very much concerned over the latter tendency and are working hard for the promotion of women and the checking of any signs of retrogressive tendency in the women's employment.

4. International Activities

This year, there were more eminent visitors from abroad than any previous year, and also many well-known Japanese women visited other countries. To mention some, several Diet women members went abroad either to observe the status of other countries or to take part in the conferences. Mrs. Togano, a Socialist member of the Lower House attended the Asiatic Conference of Socialist Party held at Langoon, Mrs. Kora, a Non-partisan member of the Upper House joined the Repatriation Committee and went to negotiate for the repatriation from People's China, Mrs. Koro, a Progressive Party member of Upper House made a tour of observation in the South-East Asia, Mrs. Yamashita, a Progressive Party member of the Lower House attended the special Commission on Prisoners of War

held at Geneva in August, Miss Oishi, a Socialist Party member of the Lower House attended the Conference of the Legislators' League of the World held at Stockholm. From the Government, Miss Fujita, the Director of the Women' & Minors' Bureau of Labor Ministry was sent to New York in March as an official observer to attend the Session of the Commission on the Status of Women of UN. There were many other women who went abroad or attended international conferences either officially or unofficially, including the Peace Conference mentioned before.

Of the outstanding guests from abroad who were welcomed here this year, Mrs. Myrdal, Chief of Social Science Division of UNESCO came in April and she took part in our Women's Week Campaign and made two weeks' tour in the country and gave speeches, had talks with women and made observations, contributing a great deal to the awakening of Japanese women's social consciousness. Another important guest was Mrs. Roosevelt who came in May on the International Interchange programs sponsored by Rockefeller Fund, and although she came not aiming to make friends with women especially, she had much contact with women here, and contributed very much to the mutual understanding of Japan and America, although sometimes the discussions were quite intense and delicate. Mrs. Anna Laud Strauss, the former assistant delegate to UN of US government, came on the Exchange of Persons' Program sponsored by US State Department and for a month she travelled throughout Japan and contributed a great deal in giving advices to the education of women as voters. In September, Japanese government sponsored the Asiatic Conference of ILO and many delegates and staffs of ILO offices came from various countries, and we had much contact with the foreign participants. UNESCO also sent two women experts, Dr. Le Plac of Belgium and Dr. Goshe of India to make surveys of educational opportunities for women in Japan, and both women staffs in the government and women members of civic organizations cooperated with them in their survey work. Moreover, we welcomed

Indian legislators and others, had guests from Pakistan, Egypt, etc, in fact, guests from almost all the countries of the world came to visit, and this fact impresses women of Japan that the world has become very small.

5. Social Problems

a) Prostitution Problem

The continued push by women since many years before, for the enactment of the Prohibition Law of Prostitution succeeded to make the Legislative Committee of Upper House to submit to the Diet the Bill of Punishment of Prostitution in March, but unfortunately it did not become a law because of the dissolution of the Diet, and since the new members were elected in April, this bill has been on discussion again both in the Upper House Committee and administrative authorities concerned, to say nothing of the women's organizations. The demands for quick and effective measures to be taken against prostitution including those against the prostitution in the neighborhood of reservation areas of UN forces, are becoming so noisy, and the pressure by women's organizations in all the country in cooperation with the united body of women Diet members has become so strong that the Cabinet decided at last in December to set up a Committee in the Prime Minister's Office to examine the problem and establish an over-all measures against the prostitution. (This Committee started in February 1954).

b) Welfare Measures for Widows and their Dependent Children

The Law for the Loan of Widows and their Dependent Children has become effective since April and many widows and their children have been sharing its benefits.

The number of woman-headed families with children under full 18 counts over 600,000 and of the total families under Life-protection numbering 700,000, more than half are woman-headed families, and even those who are not protected

by Life-protection, many of them are very poor and need help and this Loan supplies widows and their dependents the fund for starting business, for taking employment, for acquiring skill or qualification for business or employment. Applicants for the loans are so many and the funds are too small yet, and the Widows' Organizations are requesting the government to extend the fund and establish a more inclusive policy of employment for widows.

6. Education

In education, some criticism has arisen in the system of coeducation and equal opportunity which was a new system after the War, and it seems some adjustments of the so-called excessive policies are being attempted. For example, the Advisory Committee for Curriculum of Education Ministry reported the Education Minister this autumn the necessity of improvement of Social course and Domestic course at high schools, implying the necessity of making the Social course include moral teaching and also of making the Domestic course requisite to girls only. In fact, many teachers and parents seem to desire to have their girls to be trained in the old way and this is thought to be a kind of backward step in education, and progressive people are opposing this tendency and insisting on absolute equal opportunity in education.

7. Culture, Art, Sports, etc.

In these fields, many honors in the international level were gained by Japanese women and they are now coming up to the international level and through these activities, women feel they have no frontiers. Japanese women today, enjoy the first-hand musics of the world through radio and concerts, go to see the first-hand art exhibits, read newest novels and essays of Europe and America, and come into contact with the newest mode of living through movies.

Thus, Japanese women are making progress all the time, although they have passed some of the problems of 1953 on to 1954 to be solved.

東京婦人少年

