

# ON INTERNATIONAL WOMEN'S DAY

by YURIKO MIYAMOTO

*translated from the Japanese by* AMY OBERMEYER

YURIKO MIYAMOTO

*(1899–1951) was a novelist, activist, and literary critic. She was deeply engaged in politics before, during, and after the Asia-Pacific War, serving in the Japanese Communist Party as the head of the Culture and Women section and co-organizing the Women's Democratic Club.*

LAST AUTUMN, the Japanese Proletarian Writer's Alliance established the Women's Committee as a literary activity auxiliary belonging to its Central Committee.

Originally, within proletarian literature, there was no such thing as "proletarian women's literature." That is obvious. Yet: the entirety of the lives of the peasants and farmers who are fighting against oppression—both men and women—should be revived and reflected through the expression of class-conscious art within our proletarian literature. Could it be the case that up until now, the proletarian authors, only a few of them women, have been able to bring to life the trivial yet serious daily experiences of workers, peasants, and women workers without having omitted a great deal?

Due to capitalism's impasses—factory closures, downsizing, pay stagnation, over three million unemployed, rural depression—the lives of the proletariat and the peasants have been backed into a corner. In a life already so oppressed, even more oppressive are the lives of the woman proletarian and peasant masses. Not only is their murderous wage only one-third that of the men, they are being oppressed more severely

than male workers in the factory, working under the worst conditions and for around thirteen hours per day. In distressed rural villages and within the households of the unemployed, the burden borne by women is beyond description. Moreover, the bourgeoisie and the landowners have devised a crafty strategy: mobilizing Maidens' Associations,<sup>1</sup> official women's magazines, and all other repressive cultural institutions to keep women's culture slavishly repressed.

What do they say but, "What? Are you not an impertinent woman?"? Thus, they try to continue this feudal subjugation, this twofold exploitation.

The intensification of the proletarian and peasant class structure has, by real necessity, also awakened the masses of women. Because of men's unemployment, women are fighting the worst working conditions while participating in industry. Women are thus rapidly coming to understand the force of their class and the power of its unity. It is not just that a young farm woman, her head wrapped in a hand towel in the manner of women laborers, merely grabs her field hoe and joins the labor conflict. It is not just that women workers strike bravely. Women of the proletarian and

1. Maidens' Associations were young women's auxiliaries of government-run or -affiliated youth groups such as the newly formed, male-only Great Japan Youth Union Group. Such groups began appearing in Japan around the time of the Russo-Japanese war but began to proliferate rapidly in the 1920s.

peasant classes have come to a point at which they cannot but feel keenly the intensity of their class struggle—even in their mundane purchase of vegetables at the green-grocer's, even in childbirth.

However, we can hardly say that the proletarian writers are making art of the seemingly trivial yet persistent daily struggle which women face as part of a complex fight for the liberation of the proletarian and peasant classes. The woman writer freely narrating her own experience as a proletarian or peasant has yet to come. The Japan Proletarian Writers' Alliance, being on the side of right, has already criticized itself, female proletarian writers included, for having overlooked the struggles of women, who constitute half the masses, in their literary activities. In order to correct this oversight, and in order to depict more graphically the relationship between the unique historical praxis of the masses of women who are central to the emancipation movement and the struggles of the class as a whole, as well as to train proletarian and peasant woman writers and correspondents in the literary circle and to inspire all the activities of the Japanese Proletarian Writers' Alliance, this oversight was corrected and the Women's Committee was established.

That the Japanese Proletarian Writers' Alliance has directed special attention to women's literary activities is correct from every perspective inasmuch as class is concerned. That's because only in the proletarian worldview can women and men be considered comrades in the foundation of social labor. As Lenin says, true emancipation of the masses must entail the

emancipation of women. Because when the masses of women in the reality of our daily lives sufficiently participate in the movement of emancipation, that gesture cannot but be truthfully reflected in our proletarian literature, a class weapon. It can only signify a triumph for proletarian culture that new women's proletarian literature has appeared.

ALREADY HALF A YEAR has passed since last September, when the Women's Committee was established. At the first of the year, at the general meeting of the Tokyo branch, the Women's Committee was divided, for the sake of convenience, into the upper committee and the Tokyo committee. Although it has only been six months, thanks to the activities of the Women's Committee, the numbers of members in the Tokyo Branch have already grown. In the time since the formation of the Japan Proletarian Cultural Federation as the sole glorious umbrella organization, the Japanese Proletarian Writers' Alliance has sent several women writers to the women's convention as conference members.

Women in the Writers' Alliance, alongside members of other cultural organizations, are playing a crucial role in the editorial board of *Working Woman*, the sole class-affiliated women's magazine. Through literary activities such as symposia, workshops, and literary circles, the Women's Committee has been working closely with each and every sub-department, systematically embracing every opportunity to draw the masses of women into proletarian literary activities. This past December, the Writers' Alliance expanded central com-

mittee decided to include a women's column in *Literature News*, a publication with 25,000 readers. As everyone knows, *Literature News* plays an important role in organizing literary circles. Even those who don't read *Proletarian Literature* read *Literature News*. Thus, the appearance of this women's column is particularly significant for organizing woman readers of *Literature News*, as well as for acquiring more women readers and producing correspondents and literary circle members.

Incidentally, while expanding its central committee, the Writers' Alliance found one major flaw concerning the activities of the Women's Committee. No provisions at all were mentioned regarding the masses of women in the report to the Central Committee on each regional branch's literary or organizational activities. The Japanese proletarian writers now have seven branches and fourteen branch-planning meetings throughout the country. There are also roughly 210 literary circles led by those branches. However, even in the reports from representatives to the Central Committee from such relatively strong branches as Osaka, Kochi, and Nagano, there was not even a single word about the problem of women's committees nor a word concerning provisions related to the work of literature for the masses of women. This is clear evidence that branches across the country failed entirely to understand the class-based mission of the Writers' Alliance Women's Committee.

The Writers' Alliance Women's Committee has deferred in its obligation to ensure that each branch carry out without delay activities concerning women's wide-ranging and positive

activities in proletarian literature as a central aspect in the broader cultural class struggle. That is one of the obvious reasons for the deficiencies we find in the branches' reports to the Central Committee. However, when observing this phenomenon from the point of view of the general proletarian culture movement in Japan, it quite quickly becomes apparent that class-affiliated cultural activities of women are lagging behind. The weight of the reactionary culture of the enemy bourgeoisie and landlord classes continues to exert a suppressive force on the cultural standards of the woman proletarian and peasant classes. Moreover, if we don't furiously, resolutely begin to fight the reactionary culture that debases and restrains the masses of women, it will come to be that the whole proletarian culture movement in Japan is similarly debased, similarly depressed, hitched together on the enemy's pike.

IN WHAT SORT OF ERA are we now living?

As a result of the Manchurian Incident, bourgeois culture is frantically, blatantly becoming more and more reactionary. Bourgeois authors such as Mikami Otokichi and Naoki Sanjugo—whom many read, particularly unaffiliated<sup>2</sup> lovers of literature, and women

2. As literary circles and schools (together constituting the so-called *bundan*) were a much greater part of Japanese literary life during Miyamoto's time, Miyamoto here is referring to readers who were unaffiliated with any particular group or circle.

first and foremost—joined hands and became the literary mercenaries of the military.

We masses of women are absolutely opposed to the war of imperialist invasion, which is only undertaken to protect the interests of the landlords and bourgeoisie. What are we to do about the hardships of the countryside, robbed of its young workers, where they are unable even to buy fertilizer? There are three million unemployed who won't just disappear because of the war. More and more labor conditions are only worsening. In preparation for war, prohibitions against the export of gold have been reinstated, and, as a result, prices have risen 30%. Even fertilizer is more expensive, and wages will never increase accordingly. Rice hoarded in the speculators' and landlords' granaries drives prices upwards in struggling villages. What is left for the people in them? Not to mention the lives of the exploited masses in the colonies of Korea and Taiwan. In order to ward off class warfare, the ruling class arouses war fever through senninbari,<sup>3</sup> printed matter, radio, and every possible cultural institution. Under the guise of national unity, strikes and rural uprisings are being crushed by White Terror, which grows crueler with each passing day.

3. *Senninbari*, literally thousand-person stitches, were sashes given to soldiers as good luck charms, a tradition which began nationally in the late nineteenth century during the First Sino-Japanese War. Women relatives of soldiers would stand in well-trafficked public spaces and ask each female passer-by to sew one stitch on the sash. During the height of war, however, women's organizations would gather in large groups to mass-produce senninbari to send to soldiers overseas.

The Japanese proletarian and peasant classes are resolutely trying to fight the proto-fascist ruling class. These are the urgent circumstances that International Women's Day will confront on March 8th. This Women's Day will have epoch-making importance, especially for Japanese proletarians and peasants who are fighting the imperialist anti-Soviet warmongers of the world and those in the proto-fascist ruling class in particular. It is never just a one-day campaign on the proletarian calendar. With an eye to May Day, we will carry on the ultimate struggle against the culture of the reactionary ruling class. Women's Day must be understood as the lifeblood of this struggle. Proletarian and peasant men may, for example, bravely resist fascism and the war of imperialist invasion; but if women under the influence of Maidens' Associations and other reactionary cultural groups persist in making, for example, senninbari so as to aid the ruling class in their mass murders, and if women refuse to strike, and if women work to collect comfort money for frontline soldiers that deadens their class-consciousness, then in the end, what is it all for?

In rural areas and small cities, feudalism is powerful and makes itself felt even in the trivial emotions of daily life. Even as the revolution grows in proportion to the world situation generally, the masses of women, regardless of whether they are involved in industry, are in danger of being caught up in reactionary culture from all sides.

ACROSS THE COUNTRY, every branch of the Proletarian Writers' Alliance is an honorable force in the proletarian literary

and culture movement. Our duty is to create locally-specific class-affiliated art in order to fight reactionary culture. In this context, efforts are already under way to create unique artworks that are characteristic of proletarian cultural activity, which will cultivate the ever-growing struggle while increasing women's cultural standards. As a memorial to International Women's Day in 1932, each and every regional branch of the Proletarian Writers' Alliance must address itself to the task of establishing a women's committee. The central executive agency of every branch must, as one of its functions, motivate departments such as organization and education to take seriously and regard as a class mission the recruitment of female members. Self-education of women's alliance members, acquisition of companionship for women writers and, especially, organizing and mobilizing various campaigns related to women's issues are all activities belonging within the purview of the Women's Committee. For each female reporter, let us produce another!

To the branches' literary circles: how many women are counted among your members? As International Women's Day approaches, the time has come for all branches—but especially those in the countryside, where there are women employed in various enterprises—to vigorously organize the masses of women into literary or cultural circles. And from these circles, we must train more and more women as literary and cultural workers. Existing circles, even those wherein there are yet no women, must necessarily have events and discussions commemorating International Women's Day. We must explain its

concrete role in the peasant and proletarian struggle against the ruling classes' growing fascism and the imperialist war. We must also tie this together with our support for the Soviet alliance. Circle leaders must advocate so that each member of each circle understands the increase in women's participation as a proletarian value. Materials such as *Literature News* and *Working Woman* should be quite useful for this activity.

Now, when the time of class struggle is imminent, retrieving as many women as possible from the influence of Maidens' Associations, from reactionary magazines' readers groups and bringing them into the proletarian literature and culture movement is work that cannot be postponed, not even for an instant. In regions where there are considerable numbers of frontline soldiers, we must agitate to build awareness that warfare is sown by the bourgeois class. We might, for instance, consider distributing "Bayonet Harvesting," Sakurai Tadayoshi's revelation about war correspondents, and then gradually organize them into circles. These tasks must be immediately and actively undertaken in each branch. Our task is not limited to the singular event of International Women's Day on March 8th, but we must target March 8th in commemoration of this historical International Women's Day, 1932, as our declaration of the ever ongoing swell in the class struggle that will continue its aggressive expansion until our day of ultimate triumph.

TRANSLATOR'S NOTE: The proceeding is a speech Yuriko Miyamoto gave to the Japanese Communist Party in 1932 on the occasion of International Women's Day, celebrated on March 8 in honor of the women textile workers whose strike on that day in 1917 had precipitated the Russian Revolution.

The year 1932 was relatively early in the process of Japanese imperial expansion. The Manchurian Incident to which she refers (also known as the Mukden Incident or the September 18th Incident) was a ruse concocted by the Japanese government to justify their invasion of Manchuria. Japan had orchestrated a very small-scale attack on a railway it administered there, which they had then blamed on Chinese dissidents. Following this invasion, the Japanese government had installed a puppet regime in the area, which they maintained until full-scale invasion of China in 1937. Only Taiwan and Korea, which Miyamoto also mentions in this piece,

were earlier acquisitions—Taiwan after the first Sino-Japanese war and Korea in 1905.

Fascist tendencies were then circulating not only within the government but also among Japanese intellectuals, including many prominent philosophers and authors. Japanese imperialism, under the guise of the so-called Greater East Asian Co-Prosperity Sphere, was presented domestically and to the world as a form of resistance against Western imperialism. Even as more and more of her peers conceded to the rising tide of imperialism and statism, Miyamoto maintained her outspoken opposition. Shortly after giving this speech, Miyamoto was for the first time imprisoned by the Japanese police for violating the Peace Preservation Laws. From 1932 through the end of the war, she would be imprisoned a total of five times, amounting to two years spent in jail. She continued during this time to write prolifically, even as her work was being censored by the

government. Miyamoto died in 1951 as a result of sepsis, though many attribute her premature death at least in part to the harsh conditions she suffered while incarcerated.

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