HATTA SHŪZŌ AND PURE ANARCHISM IN INTERWAR JAPAN

Also by John Crump

NON-MARKET SOCIALISM IN THE NINETEENTH AND
TWENTIETH CENTURIES (*edited with Maximilien Rubel*)
STATE CAPITALISM: The Wages System under New
Management (*co-authored with Adam Buick*)
THE ORIGINS OF SOCIALIST THOUGHT IN JAPAN

Hatta Shūzō and Pure Anarchism in Interwar Japan

John Crump

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This book is dedicated to Derek and Marjorie Crump, who taught me that no things are more important than mutual love, social justice, and decency in human relations

Sketch of Hatta Shūzō by Mochizuki Kei

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JOHN CRUMP

Author's Note

Japanese names are given in the customary East Asian form, i.e. family name (e.g. Hatta) followed by personal name (e.g. Shūzō). Long vowels in Japanese words are indicated by macrons (e.g. ō).

Introduction: the Importance of Pure Anarchism

‘Pure anarchism’ was the dominant current within Japanese anarchism during the interwar years. Its adherents were anarchist communists who wished to rid anarchism of the ‘impurity’ of syndicalism. It might well be asked: why write a book on these pure anarchists? After all, did they not ultimately fail in their attempt to establish an anarchist communist society and are they not largely forgotten today even within Japan? Besides, was it not Spain where anarchism’s life-and-death struggle was fought in the 1930s? Why, then, should we in Europe pay much attention to what happened during roughly the same period in an East Asian country, far removed from the drama in Spain?

In reply, I can give at least three reasons why a study of Japanese pure anarchism is worthwhile. First, the image of the Japanese (including Japanese working men and women) which has prevailed in the West during recent decades has been of an overwhelmingly conformist and docile people. The oft-repeated epithet ‘economic animals’ has been used to describe the apparent character of the Japanese during much of the postwar period and has conveyed their seeming indifference to political principles or ethical questions. At an early stage of my research into pure anarchism I read a paper on ‘The Communist Idea in Japan’ at a seminar in Oxford, where I was criticised because I had supposedly overlooked the ‘fact’ that the Japanese are the most unrevolutionary, order-loving and conformist people in the world. Of course, this widely held image derives from attributing to all Japanese in all eras certain characteristics which, even if present today (and it is arguable that they are nowhere near as universal as is often claimed), are of very short historical duration. Not only does this image conflict with the percep-

tion of the Japanese as a revolutionary people, which was widespread throughout East Asia in the years following the upheaval of 1868, but it also clashes with the supposedly unJapanese concern for political principles and ideological clarity which was demonstrated by the pure anarchists of the interwar years. Hence one reason for writing a book on the pure anarchists is that I think it is instructive to draw the attention of Western readers to those 'other Japanese', those whose very existence (irrespective of their concrete achievement) modifies the negative image projected by their depressingly conformist countrymen and countrywomen.

A second reason for my interest in the pure anarchists is that they represent an authentically Japanese expression of the universal principles of communism. By communism I mean, of course, not the system of bureaucratic power, party domination, and state manipulation of the economy found in countries such as (until recently) Russia and China, but the project to reorganise society so as to achieve a community of social equals who would control the means of production communally, cooperatively organise production for the direct satisfaction of needs, and consume by taking freely from the commonly held wealth of society. Such a vision of social reorganisation got its first fully worked-out presentation in Japanese when Petr Kropotkin's (1842–1921) *The Conquest of Bread* was translated in 1909. Although *The Conquest of Bread* struck a responsive chord among many radical Japanese of that era, it remained very much a Japanese translation of an essentially European work. The very title *The Conquest of Bread* (as opposed to *The Conquest of Rice*) indicates the (for many Japanese) exotically European flavour of Kropotkin's passionate arguments for communism. Kropotkin remained the dominant influence on the pure anarchists during the interwar years and this was reinforced when his *Collected Works* were published in Japanese from 1928. Nevertheless, by that period communism had been fully assimilated by its Japanese exponents, so that by then the pure anarchists were able to relate it thoroughly to Japanese society and present it to a Japanese audience in an authentically Japanese form. Thus, when the pure anarchists wrote texts of

their own to popularise communism, the commune which they, like anarchist communists everywhere, advocated as the unit of communist society had ceased to be a European transplant from Kropotkin's texts and was clearly a Japanese farming village, transformed by an anarchist revolution no doubt, but none the less Japanese for that. Likewise, those who were expected to bring about this social transformation were not cosmopolitan revolutionaries expressing European concepts in *katakanaesque* Japanese, but flesh and blood products of Japanese society, such as the tenant farmers.

Several years ago Maximilien Rubel and I edited a volume of essays under the title *Non-Market Socialism in the Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries*.¹ 'Non-market socialism' was a synonym for what I have referred to here as 'communism'. Although in that earlier book we chose not to use the word 'communism' because of our concern that it might be misinterpreted as having a connection with the political systems formerly or actually found in Russia, China and elsewhere, there is no alternative to employing the term here, since 'anarchist communism' was the declared aim of the pure anarchists. Our theme in *Non-Market Socialism in the Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries* was that, although a communist society has so far never been achieved anywhere, communism has nevertheless had a constant, if unsteady, existence during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries as a challenge to the ideology of capitalism. For as long as there has been industrial capitalism, groups of working men and women have reacted to its existence, and to the indignities and irrationalities which inevitably accompany it, by formulating a communist alternative. The book argued that neither social democracy nor bolshevism represented communist challenges to capitalism, since both were variations on the capitalist theme, in that they left intact the principal constituent elements of capitalism (the wages system, commodity production, state power and so on). The real challenge to capitalism has come from quarters other than social democracy or bolshevism, and the currents we examined as different versions of this communist challenge in the various chapters of our book were the following:-

- 1 Anarchist communism, represented from approximately 1880 onwards by a string of thinkers and activists, such as Kropotkin and Alexander Berkman (1870–1936).
- 2 The impossibilism of currents such as the Socialist Party of Great Britain, which was founded in 1904 in the course of the split between ‘possibilists’ and ‘impossibilists’ in the ranks of the Social Democratic Federation in Britain.
- 3 The council communism associated with the German Revolution of 1918 and its aftermath, which was articulated by theoreticians such as Anton Pannekoek (1873–1960), Otto Rühle (1874–1943) and Paul Mattick (1904–81).
- 4 Bordigism, which takes its name from Amadeo Bordiga (1889–1970), the first leader of the Communist Party of Italy, before the leadership of that party passed in 1924 to others more acceptable to the Comintern, such as Antonio Gramsci (1891–1937).
- 5 The situationism of the Situationist International, whose activity spanned the period 1957 to 1972 and was one of the streams feeding the upheaval in Paris in May 1968.

Considered in isolation, it is tempting to dismiss any one of these five currents as too weak to be of much significance. Taken together, however, they represent a sustained critique of capitalism and a consistently posed, communist alternative to it. Naturally, there have been differences between these currents, which have kept them divided and over which they have argued (particularly with regard to the question of means), but each in its own way has effectively kept alive the goal of a communist society and has thus prevented capitalism from enjoying unchallenged ideological supremacy. What gives these currents added significance as a collective phenomenon is that they have emerged largely independently of one another at different historical junctures and in different geographical locations. Bordigism is as recognisably the product of Italian influences and circumstances as impossibilism

owes much to its Anglo-Saxon origins. The repeated emergence of these organisationally separate and culturally distinct formulations of what still remains essentially the same communist alternative to capitalism suggests that it is in the nature of capitalism, wherever it exists, to evoke a communist response which does not vary in its fundamentals. From the standpoint of the late twentieth century, it may look as though capitalism rules the world untroubled and has successfully countered all attempts to replace it by communism. Yet, as the existence of these communist currents demonstrates, despite its apparatus of ideological domination, capitalism has proved unable to eradicate an alternative communist vision of how society could be organised. As long as varieties of this communist alternative remain to haunt capitalism, its supremacy is less than total and the possibility of achieving communism cannot be discounted.

It is with these considerations in mind that I have approached the study of the Japanese pure anarchists. Since capitalism is a world phenomenon, it would be strange indeed if communist ideological challenges to capitalism were all of European origin, like the five currents mentioned above. Obviously, of the European communist currents which I have identified, Japanese pure anarchism had most in common with European anarchist communism. Nevertheless, as I indicated earlier, the pure anarchists did not simply repeat parrot-fashion lessons learnt by rote from the European anarchist communists. The ability of the pure anarchists to take account of the way in which capitalism had developed in Japan, and to respond creatively to its special features by offering an alternative which was no less communist for being rooted in Japanese conditions, is further confirmation of the argument that capitalism invariably evokes a communist response from within the ranks of those whom it oppresses and exploits. Hence, despite Japanese pure anarchism's lack of concrete success, its very existence can be regarded as significant when it is set within the international context outlined above. Particularly if one's knowledge and experience of communism hitherto have conspired to give it the appearance of a predominantly European ideological

construct, it can be more than a little exciting to recognise the pure anarchists as the Japanese equivalent of the European currents to which I have alluded.

A third reason for writing a book on the pure anarchists is the sophisticated theoretical level which the best among them were able to achieve. Writing from a European perspective in his chapter in *Non-Market Socialism in the Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries*, Alain Pengam claimed that after Kropotkin's death in 1921 the theory of anarchist communism survived for a while, 'but was consigned to isolation by the unfolding counter-revolution from the 1920s onwards'.

Unlike the Italian Left [Bordigists] and the German-Dutch council communists (the latter above all, with their criticism of the whole workers' movement and their analysis of the general tendency for a unification of labour, capital and the state), the partisans of anarcho-communism did not really try to discover the causes of this counter-revolution; nor did they perceive its extent. As a result, their contributions amounted to little more than a formal defence of principles, without any critical depth. Moreover, these contributions ceased very rapidly. Sebastien Faure's *Mon Communisme* appeared in 1921, Luigi Galleani's *The End of Anarchism?* in 1925 and Alexander Berkman's *What Is Communist Anarchism?* (better known in its abridged form as the *ABC of Anarchism*) in 1929.²

Even with regard to Spanish anarchism, Pengam was sceptical whether the collectivisations in Spain from 1936 contained any anarchist communist potential, since he regarded Spanish 'libertarian communism' of the 1930s as an 'empty phrase'.³

The contrast between the withering of anarchist communist theory in Europe after the First World War and its flowering in Japan during the interwar years is striking. As will be demonstrated in Chapter 1, in Europe after 1918 anarchist communists were largely content to echo Kropotkin's writings and even tolerated a dilution of theoretical clarity, with the result that eventually anarchist communism ceased to have a coherent identity of its own and was incorporated into

the wishy-washy cocktail of nondescript 'anarchism'. By way of contrast, in interwar Japan the confrontation between anarchist syndicalists and their pure anarchist opponents forced the latter to define ever more clearly the theoretical bases of their activity. As a result, the interwar years were a period of intense theoretical innovation in Japan and, in contrast to what happened in Europe, anarchist communist theory did not stagnate at the points at which Kropotkin had left it or, worse still, even regress. There is a tendency among Japanese commentators to regret the confrontation that occurred between anarchist syndicalists and pure anarchists, and to regard it as the suicide of a movement already beleaguered by the twin enemies of capitalism and bolshevism. Yet, without such intense polemics between anarchist syndicalists and pure anarchists, anarchist communism would probably have withered on the bough in Japan as in Europe, so that there would be no particular reason today for studying a movement which displayed the same fading qualities as its contemporaries in Europe.

Among the theoreticians of pure anarchism none was more innovative or determined to rid anarchist theory of extraneous elements, derived from syndicalism or elsewhere, than Hatta Shūzō (1886–1934). Even in Japan, Hatta is largely forgotten these days outside of anarchist circles. I spent several months in Japan in 1990, engaged in research for this book, and I was struck by the fact that mention of my research theme prompted most scholars with whom I came in contact to dive for the biographical dictionary on their shelves to discover who on earth was Hatta Shūzō. Needless to say, in the West the situation is bleaker still and Hatta is totally unknown. This is incongruous, since in the West at least something is known about Japanese anarchism and, for example, both Kōtoku Shūsui (1871–1911) and Ōsugi Sakae (1885–1923) have had (albeit unsympathetic) biographies written on them by American scholars.⁴ In Chapter 2 I explain Kōtoku's and Ōsugi's contributions to anarchism in Japan and it is certainly far from my purpose in this book to belittle either of them. Both are towering personalities in the history of Japanese anarchism. Yet it is also fair to say that neither can be considered to have made a significant,

original contribution to anarchist theory. On the international level they are secondary figures, since the roles they fulfilled were mainly to introduce and popularise Western theories of anarchism in Japan. By way of contrast, fate has not been kind to a gifted and original thinker like Hatta. Language has acted as a barrier to an appreciation in the West of his stature as a theoretician, while in Japan the prevalence of bolshevism within the relevant scholarly circles has caused him to be ignored. Hopefully, the publication of this book, which is the first full-length study of Hatta Shūzō and pure anarchism to appear in any language, will belatedly bring to Hatta and his comrades a little of the recognition they richly deserve.

At any rate, to return to my first two reasons for writing this book, the reader can be assured that the chapters which follow will focus on a refreshingly rebellious breed of Japanese, one of whom was Hatta, and on theories which challenge every assumption on which the capitalist state in Japan (and elsewhere, for that matter) currently rests. Those disinclined to gawp in open-mouthed admiration at the soulless consumerism of modern Japan should read on. The pure anarchists make a welcome change from the human automata featured in the ubiquitous manuals on Japanese management techniques. Likewise, their ideas stand in complete contrast to the unquestioning acceptance of hierarchy and profit which, if the same sources were to be believed, is supposed to be a genetically imprinted characteristic of the Japanese. Happily, what the pure anarchists demonstrate is that there is nothing about being Japanese which prevents men and women from recognising the shortcomings of capitalism or which inoculates them against the vision of an alternative system of free, communist social relations.

Map of Principal Japanese Islands