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Japanese Money and the Russian Revolution, 1904-1905

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In June 1906 the Souvorin publishing house in St. Petersburg published a booklet entitled "The Seamy Side of Revolution. Armed Uprising in Russia on Japanese Funds." It included reproductions of photocopies of letters sent by the former Japanese military attache in Russia, Colonel Akashi, to Konni Zilliacus and George Dekanozi in the first six months of 1905. Of Akashi's two correspondents, Zilliacus was an organizer and leader of the Finnish party of active resistance, formed in November 1904, and Dekanozi was one of the leaders of the Georgian party of socialist-federalist-revolutionaries, founded in April of the same year. The published correspondence dealt with purchase and illegal shipment to Russia of large quantities of weapons for revolutionary purposes. A passage in the booklet's Preface described the Japanese and the Russian revolutionaries as "worthy of each other in their cynical indifference to the choice of means for fighting. One soiled the glory of arms with the dirt of bribery, the others defiled the great word freedom by selling their motherland."¹

At the time this publication as a whole was received with distrust. In 1907 the publisher wrote in his diary "when we said that money for the Russian revolution had been obtained from abroad, we were laughed at."² But the documents Souvorin published were in fact genuine, and had been acquired by a Paris agent of the Russian Police Department. They were part of a special dossier, entitled "Reprehensible anti-Russian activities of the Japanese Colonel Akashi and his collaborators Dekanozi, Zeliacus and others," opened by the Police Department as early as November 1904.

Until recently historical writing about this affair, especially Russian and Soviet, has been scanty. In Soviet historiography, for instance, Akashi's activity during 1904-1905 was more or less known only in relation to the Paris conference of revolutionary and oppositional parties summoned in autumn 1904, and to the history of the arms shipment to Russia in summer 1905 by the steamer "John Grafton."³ Western historiography has paid much more attention to the subject, relying mostly on the memoirs of participants in the events described, for instance two volumes of memoirs by Zilliacus, one of the key figures in contacts between Japan and representatives of the Russian antitsarist popular movement, published in Helsinki in 1919-20. Among research works are monographs by Michael Futrell and John White, both published in the mid-1960s,⁴ and by Olavi Fält and William Copeland.⁵ All these authors had a high opinion of the effectiveness of Japanese intelligence during the Russo-Japanese war, and White considered it one of the three main factors in Japan's victory over its powerful northern neighbour. Japanese documents on the matter began to be published in 1966, with the appearance of one of three known versions of Akashi's report on his activities in Europe in

1904-1905, submitted by him to the General Staff after his return to Japan in December 1905.

Another version of the same report, entitled "Rakka ryusui" (a quotation from an old Chinese poem, meaning "fallen blossoms and flowing water") was published by the Japanese historian Chiharu Inaba in 1986. Two years later selected chapters from the third, most complete version of "Rakka ryusui," accompanied by thorough notes and articles by the above-mentioned O. Fält, Ch. Inaba and the Finnish historian Antti Kujala, were published in a Finnish Historical Society series. As early as 1980 Kujala had published a detailed article on the "John Grafton" affair and the plans for an uprising in St.-Petersburg in 1905.⁶ The latest historiographical event worthy of mention is an article by the Russian historian S. Petrov and the author of this article, entitled "Colonel Akashi and the liberation movement in Russia."⁷ Our purpose in writing it was not only to acquaint the Russian reader with a subject about which he previously knew nothing, but also to add some new strokes to the picture drawn by our western colleagues. We therefore relied upon documents from the Russian archives, wholly or partially unknown to western scholars. In this article I shall try to highlight those parts of the topic which are linked to the Russian popular movement and the Russian government.

Colonel Motojiro Akashi, a 38-year old professional officer and experienced diplomat, appeared at the Japanese embassy in St.Petersburg in 1902, and according to his report he tried from then on to find ways and means of contacting the Russian oppositionists or revolutionaries. We do not know whether he did this on his own initiative, or on instructions from Tokyo, but the latter is more probable, as a Japanese General staff memorandum, issued as early as mid-1903, mentioned the Russian socialist movement as a possible ally for Japan in subversion directed against Russia.⁸ However this may be, Akashi failed to establish any such contacts while in Russia. After the war began, all the Japanese diplomatic staff, including the military attache, left St.Petersburg at the end of January 1904, and went via Berlin to Stockholm. There for the first time Akashi met the leaders of the Finnish oppositionists – Konni Zilliacus and Jonas Castrèn. During their discussions Zilliacus agreed to provide Akashi with general political information about Russia, but in his party's interest firmly refused to become a Japanese spy.⁹ Subsequent events showed that he maintained this position, despite becoming one of Akashi's closest and most confidential collaborators, and even seemed to lead him at times. Zilliacus, who advocated active antitsarist struggle for Finland's independence, was one of the first among Finnish oppositionists to predict that Japan would win its war against Russia. In a public speech in February 1904 he expressed confidence that Russia's defeat would be followed by the autocracy's collapse, which in turn would open the way to greater autonomy for Finland.¹⁰ Thanks to Zilliacus Akashi found himself in the very midst of Russia's revolutionary and oppositionist emigre circles.

We cannot determine from the available sources when and in what circumstances Zilliacus put forward his plan to precipitate the launching of an armed uprising in Russia by providing financial support to the revolutionaries, but according to "Rakka ryusui" he and Akashi first discussed it as early as February 1904. Initially Akashi negotiated without approval either from Tokyo or even from senior Japanese officials stationed in Europe, but eventually the plan received the support both of Hayashi, the Japanese ambassador in London, and the General Staff.

It should be noted that the Russian authorities were unaware of these developments, even though the local agencies of the Police Department realized that the contacts between the Japanese and the Finnish oppositionists were potentially dangerous to the Russian government. All their warnings went unheeded as yet in St. Petersburg because Leonid Rataiev, the chief Police Department agent in Western Europe, attached no importance to the presence of the Japanese diplomats in Stockholm, and in February 1904 he and the Russian Consul, Bereznikov, were fully occupied bribing police officials in the Swedish capital to seize illegal Russian literature that was shipped via the city.¹¹

Thanks to Zilliacus Akashi, in parallel with Hayashi, began to negotiate with the Poles at the beginning of March 1904. The talks led to a visit to Japan by two representatives of the Polish popular movement, Roman Dmowski, a member of the Secret Council of the nationalist Liga Narodowa, and Józef Pilsudski, one of the leaders of the leftist wing of the Polish Socialist Party. The visit resulted in a subsidy of 20 thousand Pounds to Pilsudski for subversive action among Polish soldiers in the Russian Army.¹² The subsidy was rather modest, as Dmowski's viewpoint seemed preferable to the Japanese and they rejected all Pilsudski's arguments for using his Party as the basis to create no less than a home front inside Russia. The effectiveness of the Polish socialists' subversive activity among Polish soldiers is hard to assess, as the available sources tend to contradict each other. There are accounts of voluntary surrenders by entire Polish units, but other evidence suggests that there were very few desertions from the Russian side. However, the memoirs of Russian prisoners of war indicate that Poles were kept separately from them and enjoyed some privileges.¹³

But let us return to Zilliacus. He was the first among the Finnish oppositionists to acknowledge that it was pointless to operate in isolation from the Russian revolutionary movement. Long before his meeting with Akashi he had begun cooperating with Russians, in particular the Social-Democrats on practical revolutionary tasks.¹⁴ At the turn of 1903-4 he visited leaders in emigre centres of the Russian Social-Democratic and Socialist-Revolutionary Parties, and of the Polish popular movement. According to Rataiev, who was informed in detail by his agent, Azev, they discussed conditions for an "agreement" between the parties, and tried to devise a program for "combined operations."¹⁵ Akashi reported that "at the end of June 1904 relations between Zilliacus and the well-known opposition parties matured. He and I

went to Paris at almost the same time and consulted with Dekanozi of the Sakartvelo Party and Prince Loris-Melikov of the Droshak Party, about a plan to create disturbances in Russia. Zilliacus afterwards went to London and consulted Chaikovski (a member of the Socialist-Revolutionary Party).¹⁶ The consultations mentioned here dealt not only with a “plan to create disturbances in Russia,” but also with an interparty conference. Its aim, as Zilliacus explained to Akashi as early as spring 1904, was to work out an appeal against the war and arrange for demonstrations in Russia. In late April-early May 1904 Zilliacus received a positive response to his proposal from the Social-Democrats (G. V. Plekhanov) and Russian Liberals (P. B. Struve). Plekhanov’s decision was confirmed by the Party Council in June. Akashi stated in his report that “by mid-September other parties had announced that they would attend the conference.”¹⁷ And by that time the financial side of the enterprise had also been assured. Akashi read in a message signed by Deputy Chief of General Staff Nagaoka and dated 31 August 1904, “One hundred thousand Yen would be a low price to pay if the purpose can be achieved with certainty. The Staff has confidence in your ability to succeed. But obtaining cooperation among all the opposition parties is so difficult that you must take care not to spend the money on only a few parties.”¹⁸

So the conference looked to be a certainty, but at the beginning of September a new session of the RSDWP Council decided not to take part because it had established the fact of “conscious or unconscious contacts of the initiators of the conference” with the Japanese government.¹⁹ An official letter to this effect, signed by Plekhanov as Chairman of the Council, was sent to Zilliacus, and all Regional Committees of the Party were notified of the decision. On 7 September a copy of the resolution was received by Lenin, who had boycotted the Council meeting in protest at some changes made in the Central Committee staff in summer 1904.

The decision taken by the Menshevik Council of the Social-Democratic Party made a sharp distinction between Russian Social-Democrats and the other Socialist parties, which by then knew how the coming conference was to be financed, but nevertheless agreed to take part. The Mensheviks’ position resulted from their general attitude towards the Russo-Japanese war, expressed in the rejection of “defeatism” and the slogan of “immediate peace.” The Mensheviks, as F. Dan put it, were sure that “the Russian workers could not wait with arms folded for the freedom which military defeat of Russia would bring them.”²⁰ They made specific plans for a revolutionary fight to overthrow the autocracy in Russia, but, as Iu. Martov wrote subsequently, they warned in every possible way against the so-called “japanophilism” they found in revolutionary circles,²¹ by which Martov meant Lenin’s repeatedly contrasting the “despotic and backward government” of Russia with the “politically free and culturally rapidly progressing people” of Japan, or, more broadly, “progressive and advanced Asia” with “backward and reactionary Europe.”²²

Unlike the Mensheviks the leader of the Bolshevik fraction of the RSDWP saw the war as a powerful if not principal revolutionizing factor. While Plekhanov spoke of Russia's defeat only as the "lesser evil" from the point of view of prospects for the liberation movement in Russia, Lenin made the overthrow of Tsarism strictly dependent on the country's defeat in war.²³ In practical terms this meant that in Summer 1904 the Bolshevik Bonch-Bruевич, head of the Social-Democrats' dispatch office, established contacts, clearly with Lenin's knowledge, with Japanese agents in Europe to distribute Social-Democratic literature.²⁴ Because of this the Mensheviks, who then led the Party, dismissed Bonch-Bruевич.²⁵

The Conference of Revolutionary and Oppositionist Parties was held in Paris from 30 September to 4 October 1904. Its course and results have been described in detail in the literature,²⁶ and here it remains only to stress that its initiators' aspiration to coordinate the activity of the parties came to nought, even though the joint interparty committee set up at the Conference nominally existed at least until mid-March 1905. It goes without saying that both the Russian and the Japanese governments received detailed information about the conference from their agents.

Immediately after the conference Akashi, who until then had stayed behind the scenes, negotiated with delegates who had represented the revolutionary parties. After they voted to obstruct the Russian government's mobilisation program the Japanese personally promised their parties financial support.²⁷ The possibility cannot be excluded that as a result of those negotiations the revolutionaries were permitted to suggest other organizations suitable to receive Japanese subsidies. In her memoirs A. Tyrkova, an author and a prominent member of the Constitutional-Democratic Party, recalled witnessing such a suggestion made by a member of the Socialist-Revolutionary Party to Struve, who rejected it out of hand.²⁸

As for the Russian Okhrana, it should be noted that it began to investigate the contacts between Japan and the Russian revolutionaries only in autumn 1904. The man it sent to Europe to become Akashi's main antagonist from the Russian side was I. F. Manasevich-Manuilov, well known in the Police Department as a specialist in delicate cases. Manuilov's activity in Western Europe initially proved very successful. By the end of the year he had succeeded in infiltrating his agents into the Japanese Legations in Paris, The Hague and London and by doing so obtained part of the Japanese diplomatic code. It was thanks to him that St. Petersburg knew of the Japanese intent to attack the Second Pacific Ocean squadron on its way to the Far East via Europe, Africa and the Indian Ocean. He also discovered Akashi's close contacts with Dekanozi and Zilliacus.²⁹ With permission from St. Petersburg he established close surveillance over the three and soon obtained strong evidence about "the military intelligence bureau," as he called it, established and headed by Akashi in Europe. Later, in Spring and Summer 1905, he provided his Okhrana superiors with undeniable evidence that Japanese money had been distributed to the Russian revolutionary parties, and that

they were making large purchases of arms in Europe (some of the documents were published in the booklet "The Seamy Side of Revolution," mentioned above). However by then Manuilov, already reputed as a swindler, had finally compromised himself in the Police Department's eyes. From early in 1905 he began sending to St.-Petersburg large quantities of worthless Japanese documents obtained from his monitoring of the Japanese Legations in Europe (one of them was found to be a photocopy of a Chinese, not Japanese, dictionary). So when one of Manuilov's bitter enemies, P. I. Rachkovskii, became Head of the Police Department, he had little difficulty persuading General Trepov, Deputy-Minister of the Interior and favorite of the Tsar, to remove him. He was dismissed in mid-August 1905, and soon expelled altogether from the Police Department.³⁰

The important personnel changes in the Police Department in 1905 also directly influenced Rataiev's career. From the beginning of August 1905 Garting, the new Head of the Foreign agency, was so busy reforming it that it became blind as well as deaf to reports from its Western European agents. The "John Grafton" operation was then in its final stage of preparation, and but for the accidental loss of the ship at the beginning of September 1905, the arms shipment it was carrying to Russia could have had disastrous results for the new heads of the Russian Secret Police.

The Russian revolutionaries abroad greeted the events of January 1905 with great interest and hope, as did Akashi and his collaborators. At the end of January 1905 Akashi negotiated with Zilliacus and Chaikovskii in Paris, and in order to devise a plan to further the revolutionary movement in Russia it was decided to arrange a new interparty conference. Taking account of their experience of the previous conference, and the role Father Gapon had played in Russia, they decided to present him as organizer,³¹ and in the first ten days of March 1905, 17 parties received official invitations to the conference, signed by Gapon, who was, of course, a mere figurehead. Again the Mensheviks' viewpoint conflicted sharply with that of the Bolsheviks. The Mensheviks refused to take part in the conference, and obviously knowing who stood behind Gapon, declared their desire to cooperate not with him, but with, as they put it "the organizing parties."³² In March they even began to negotiate with the SRs over preparations for an armed uprising.³³ The Bolsheviks, on the other hand, attended the conference only so that they could walk out on the second day, allegedly because of overwhelming ideological pressure from the SRs there. That, at any rate, was Lenin's official explanation of his behavior to the delegates at the Third Party Congress,³⁴ but it should be noted that the participants in the conference had been announced long in advance. That being so, the only possible explanation for Lenin's appearance at the conference was his expectation that he could rely on the so-called "special" relationship with Gapon which he had established as early as February 1905. Unfortunately for Lenin the priest did not even have a vote at Geneva. The Bolsheviks clearly overestimated Gapon's importance in the revolutionary movement in Russia in general and as one of the alleged

organizers of the “John Grafton” expedition in particular. In their eagerness to obtain a share of the arms expected to be received in St. Petersburg in Summer 1905, they turned to Gapon and failed as a result.

The Conference of Revolutionary Parties (PSR, Polish Socialists, Armenian Dashnaktsutiun, Finnish Party of Active Resistance, Georgian Socialist-Federalists, Latvian Social-Democrats and Belorussian Gromada among them), took place in Geneva at the beginning of April 1905, and adopted two documents. A Declaration signed by representatives of all participating parties, called for the establishment of a democratic republic in Russia. A second document, of similar title and origin, but signed only by the Socialists, called for a struggle against bourgeois exploitation.³⁵ In terms of revolutionary practice it was decided to launch an armed uprising in Russia in the Summer. As early as March 1905 the Japanese War Ministry had provided through Akashi the large sum of 1 million yen for the needs of such an uprising³⁶ and arms purchasing, mainly by Zilliacus and Dekanozi, had already begun. All these preparations were conducted by a narrow group of initiators, not an interparty body. Something resembling one, the so-called United Fighting Organization – was formed, but never actually functioned. Its head, Azev, sensed the somewhat reserved attitude of the PSR leaders (M. Gots, above all) towards the specific plans to ship arms to St. Petersburg³⁷ and disappeared, returning to the Russian capital only at the end of August. In order to distract the attention of his police superior, Rataiev, from Northern Europe, he went to Bulgaria in June, to convey the impression that large quantities of weapons were being purchased there for the Russian revolution. In these circumstances the organizers of the affair involved Gapon, meaning his labour organization in St. Petersburg, but the priest proved unable to play any significant role in the enterprise. The perceived inability of Akashi and his collaborators to arrange for reception of the arms in Russia proved their fatal flaw.

So during the Russo-Japanese war the Japanese government endeavoured to affect the home front in Russia, so as to weaken it militarily. In Inaba’s opinion this was the first such attempt made by Japan in respect of a European state.³⁸ Its purpose was so to inflame the internal political situation as to create a war on two fronts – against the enemy within (the revolutionary movement) and without, which Tsarism would find it impossible to wage.

Notes

- 1 *Iznanka revolutsii. Vooruzhennoe vosstanie v Rossii na yaponskie sredstva* (St. Petersburg, 1906), p. 3.
- 2 *Dnevnik A. S. Souvorina* (Moscow, Petrograd, 1923), p. 342.
- 3 K. F. Shatsillo, “Iz istorii osvoboditel’nogo dvizheniia v Rossii v nachale XX veka,” (O konferentsii liberal’nikh i revolutsionnikh partii v Parizhe v sentiabre-oktiabre 1904 g.) *Istoria SSSR*, No. 4 (1982), pp. 51-70;

- Pervaiia boevaia organizatsiia bol'shevikov. 1905-1907 gg. Stat'i, vospominaniia i dokumenty* (Sost. S. M. Pozner) (Moscow, 1934).
- 4 M. Futrell, *Northern Underground. Episodes of Russian Revolutionary Transport and Communications through Scandinavia and Finland. 1863-1917* (L., 1963); J. White, *The Diplomacy of the Russo-Japanese War* (Princeton, New Jersey, 1964).
 - 5 O. Fält, *Collaboration between Japanese intelligence and the Finnish Underground during the Russo-Japanese War* (Oulu, 1977). W. Copeland, *The Uneasy Alliance. Collaboration between the Finnish Opposition and the Russian Underground, 1899-1904* (Helsinki, 1973).
 - 6 A. Kujala, "The Russian Revolutionary Movement and the Finnish Opposition, 1905. The John Grafton affair and the plans for an uprising in St.-Petersburg," *Scand. J. History*, No. 5 (1980), pp. 257-275.
 - 7 *Istoriia SSSR*, No. 6 (1990), pp. 50-71.
 - 8 M. Futrell, "Colonel Akashi and Japanese Contacts with Russian Revolutionaries in 1904-1905," *St. Antony's Papers*, No. 20, *Far Eastern Review*, No. 4 (L., 1967), p. 9.
 - 9 M. Akashi, *Rakka ryusui. Colonel Akashi's Report on His Secret Cooperation with the Russian Revolutionary Parties during the Russo-Japanese War* (Helsinki, 1988), p. 37.
 - 10 O. Fält, *Collaboration...*, p. 211.
 - 11 *Gosudarstvennyi Arkhiv Rossiiskoi Federatsii (GARF)*, Fund 102 (Police department), Osobyi otdel (Special section), 1903, Dossier 1955, l. 34-35 ob.
 - 12 Wl. Pobog-Malinowski, Jozef Pilsudski, 1901-1908. *W ognii Rewolucju* (W-wa, 1935), s. 218; *Obshchestvennoe dvizhenie na pol'skikh zemliakh. Osnovniie ideiniie techeniia i politicheskie partii v 1864-1914 gg.* (Moscow, 1988), pp. 190-191.
 - 13 F. P. Kupchinski, *V iaponskoi nevole. Ocherki iz zhizni russkikh plennikh v Iaponii v g. Matsuiama na ostrove Sikoku* (St. Petersburg, 1906), pp. 192-193.
 - 14 V. M. Smirnov, "Revolutsionnaia rabota v Finliandii (1900-1907)," *Proletarskaia revoliutsiia*, No. 1 (48) (1926), p. 219.
 - 15 *GARF*, f. 102 DP OO, 1903, d.1955. 1.20-20 ob.
 - 16 M. Akashi, *Rakka ryusui* . . . , p. 38.
 - 17 *Ibid.*, p. 40.
 - 18 *Ibid.*, p. 57.
 - 19 I. Volkovicher, "Partiia i russko-iaponskaia voina," *Proletarskaia revoliutsiia*, No. 12 (35) (1924), pp. 119-121.
 - 20 (F. Dan) "Dorogaia tsena," *Iskra*, No. 69, July 10 (1904).
 - 21 *Istoriia rossiiskoi sotsial-demokratii* (Ed. by L. Martov), (Petrograd, 1918), p. 94.
 - 22 V. I. Lenin, *Polnoe sobranie sochinenii*, v. 8, p. 170; v. 9, pp. 152, 155, 156-158.
 - 23 V. I. Lenin, *Poln. sobr. soch.*, v. 9, p. 157.

- 24 I. Volkovicher, *Op. cit.*, p. 120; "Zapis' besedi moei (G. A. Aleksinskii) s Plekhanovim v Zheneve, 1915 g.," *International Review of Social History*, v. 26, No. 3 (1981), p. 347.
- 25 *Rossiiskii Tsentri Khraneniia i Izucheniia Dokumentov Noveishei Istorii* (RTsKhIDNI), f. 17, op. 1, d. 246, l. 1.
- 26 K. F. Shatsillo, *Op. cit.*; Antti Kujala, "March Separately - Strike Together. The Paris and Geneva Conferences Held by the Russian and Minority Nationalities' Revolutionary and Opposition Parties, 1904-1905," M. Akashi, *Rakka ryusui...*, pp. 85-167.
- 27 *Ibid.*, p. 42.
- 28 Ariadna Tyrkova-Williams, *Na putiakh k svobode*, 2nd edition (L., 1990), pp. 193-195.
- 29 *GARF*, f. 102 DP OO, 1904, d. 28. l. 39.
- 30 P. E. Shchegolev, "Russkii Rokambol'. I. F. Manasevich-Manuilov po arkhivnim materialam," P. E. Shchegolev, *Okhranniki i avantiuristy* (Moscow, 1930), pp. 78-137.
- 31 M. Akashi, *Rakka ryusui...*, p. 44.
- 32 International Institute of Social History (Amsterdam). PSR fund. Box 1, No. 18. Protokol sobraniia Zagranichnogo komiteta PSR 7 apreliia 1905 g.
- 33 *Ibid.*, No. 758/11/b.
- 34 V. I. Lenin, *Poln. sobr. soch.*, v. 10, p. 181.
- 35 *Revolutsionnaia Rossiia*, No. 65, April 25 (1905), pp. 1-3.
- 36 M. Akashi, *Rakka ryusui...*, pp. 69, 82, 161.
- 37 Valtionarkisto. USA tk 19, XX1, Folder 1. M. R. Gots to N. V. Chaikovskii. August 12, 1905.
- 38 M. Akashi, *Rakka ryusui...*, p. 83.