Itō Noe (1895–1923)

David G. Nelson

2009

Contents

References and Suggested Readings 3

Born to a family of landed aristocracy on the southern island of Kyushu, Itō Noe would be forced into an arranged marriage after graduating from Ueno Girls High School. In protest she ran away to Tokyo were she would become a feminist anarchist seeking to break with the social conditions of Japan. In Tokyo she joined the Seitosha (Blue Stocking Society) and in 1915 became an editor of its magazine, *Seito* (*Blue Stocking*). This gave Itō the opportunity to develop her literary, aesthetic, and political capabilities. Skilled in several languages, including English, she translated articles by the anarchist Emma Goldman.

In 1916 Itō met Ōsugi Sakae, a prominent anarchist, and abandoned the journal to assist isugi with his writings and political activism. As a couple, Itō and Ōsugi believed in the concepts of free love, which allowed Ōsugi to conduct an affair with fellow woman anarchist Ichiko Kamachiko. However, the concepts of free love soon collided with human nature as Kamachika stabbed and severely wounded Ōsugi with a knife in a fit of jealousy. The mass media used this incident to attack Itō, Ōsugi, and Kamachika for their immorality and the anarchist movement in general. Because of this bad publicity, several prominent members of the anarchist movement split from Itō and Ōsugi.

In 1919 Itō and Ōsugi, along with fellow anarchists Wada Kyutaro and Kondo Kenji, published the first *Rodo Undo* (*Labor Movement*) magazine, seeking to form a coalition between the anarchist movement and the industrial working class. In 1921 Itō was also instrumental in the helping to form Japan's first socialist women's group, Sekirankai (Red Wave Society). Believing that this couple was a threat to domestic tran-quility, the Imperial Police kept them under constant surveillance. In the aftermath of the 1923 Tokyo earthquake many fires broke out and more people were killed by these than by the quake. Soon after, may rumors, perhaps encouraged by the authorities, began to spread that various "unpopular" anarchist groups were responsible for starting fires. As a result, mobs attacked many immigrant Korean and Chinese workers, and the police began gathering and arresting several political activists, among them Itō and Ōsugi. They were taken into custody and were beaten and strangled in the cells of the secret police. For a long time, Ōsugi had been number one on a death list circulated by the secret police, so when a secret policeman, Amakasu Masahiko, was later found guilty of the murder, on orders from Emperor Hirohito, there was little surprise. Amakasu was given a ten-year prison sentence and was later released by personal order of Hirohito and assigned to special duties in Manchuria. In 1945 he committed suicide before his crimes could be avenged by the many anarchists after his blood.

British activist Bertrand Russell would recall, in his autobiography, the first time he met Itō Noe in Japan in 1921. "She was young and beautiful … Dora [Bertrand Russell's wife] said to her: 'Are you not afraid that the authorities will do something to you?' She drew her hand across her throat, and said, 'I know they will sooner or later.'"

References and Suggested Readings

Buckley, S. (1997) Broken Silence: Voices of Japanese Feminism. Berkeley: University of California Press.

Ide, F. (2000) Jiyū sorewa watakushi jishin: hyōden Itō Noe (Liberty is Found Within Myself: A Critical Biography of Itō Noe). Tokyo: Pandora.

Sievers, S. L. (1983) Flowers in Salt: The Beginnings of Feminist Consciousness in Modern Japan. Stanford: Stanford University Press.

The Anarchist Library
Anti-Copyright



David G. Nelson
Itō Noe (1895–1923)
2009

The International Encyclopedia of Revolution and Protest, Edited by Immanuel Ness. DOI: 10.1002/9781405198073.wbierp0802

theanarchistlibrary.org