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BUNJI SUZUKI AND THE LABOR MOVEMENT IN TAISHO PERIOD

by Katsunori Nakamura

After the Kōtoku Incident of 1910, social and labor movement in Japan was suppressed by the government. However, on August 1, 1912, the "Yūaikai" (Friendly Society), a society of workers, was established by Bunji Suzuki.

This society did not have the appearance of a trade union and also did not carry out labor movement. It seemed to be a society to promote friendly relations among the workers. It developed day by day and became the main current of labor movement from the Taisho period to the beginning of the Pacific War.

Bunji Suzuki, the founder of the "Yūaikai", did not originally come from the working-class, but was an intellectual who graduated from Tokyo Imperial University. He was a humanist and from this point of view he carried out his work for the workers who were in miserable situation. He advocated slogans, such as "improvement of the personality of the workers" and "promotion of mutual friendly relations among the workers", and adopted the principle of social reformism. This is the reason why the "Yūaikai" was not placed under the pressure of the government, received support of many intellectuals, capitalists and other famous persons, and increased its members rapidly. This was the type of labor movement revived in the Taisho period.