

[Japan Society-New York: Documents Project. 1890-1930, Politics)]

Document 33: “Anyone . . . whose goal is to deny the system of private property . . .” Peace Preservation Law, 1925

1. Anyone who forms, or knowingly participates in, groups whose goal is to deny the system of private property or to change our national essence shall be sentenced to prison or penal servitude of up to ten years. Anyone who attempts to commit this crime also will be punished.

2. Anyone who engages in discussions intended to carry out the aims of Article One, Clause One shall be sentenced to prison or penal servitude of up to seven years.

3. Anyone who instigates actions by others intended to carry out the aims of Article One, Clause One, shall be sentenced to prison or penal servitude of up to seven years.

4. Anyone intending to carry out the aims of Article One, Clause One who instigates crimes resulting in riots or violence that cause damage to property, bodily injury, or destruction of life, shall be sentenced to prison or penal servitude of up to ten years.

5. Anyone who, intending to carry out the aims of Article One, Clause One or of the crimes described in the three previous clauses, gives money, goods, or other financial benefits to others, or makes promises of such for that same purpose, shall be sentenced to prison or penal servitude of up to five years. Anyone who knowingly demands or receives such remuneration, or makes a commitment for such remuneration, shall be given the same punishment.

6. Anyone guilty of the offenses in the five preceding articles who surrenders voluntarily to the police shall receive a lighter sentence or be exonerated.

7. This law shall apply to anyone who commits these crimes, even if that person lives outside the regions where the law has jurisdiction.



Source: Draft law in *Tokyo Asahi Shimbun*, February 13, 1925, in Uchikawa Yoshimi and Matsushima Eiichi, eds. *Taishō nyūsu jiten* (Encyclopedia of Taishō news). Vol. 7. Tokyo: Mainichi Komiyunkēshiyon Shuppanbu, 1989), 405. James L. Huffman, trans.

Context.

The 1910s and 1920s were a time of considerable social unrest and political debate in Japan, a time when people demonstrated in the streets for lower taxes and greater political rights, when labor unions and left-wing political parties formed, and when movies and popular journals promoted Western-style individualism. While progressives lauded the period's vitality, officials worried about a breakdown of the social order and a loss of control. One response was the 1925 Peace Preservation Law, which banned the expression of any ideas deemed anti-capitalist or dangerous to the national essence (*kokutai*). This law served as a foundation for thought control efforts that would grow increasingly oppressive across the next fifteen years.

Questions.

1. Make a list of all of the activities banned by this law; then analyze what kinds of speech still were permitted.
2. This law was passed about four weeks after the adoption of universal male suffrage (Document 32). Do you think there might have been any connection between the two laws? Why?
3. How might this law have led to the creation, not long afterward, of what historians have called the “thought police”?



Terms.

“*System of private property.*” Few things worried Japanese officials more than the potential for Japan to become socialist, particularly after the 1917 triumph of Communism in Russia. This phrase was a reference to capitalism, a prohibition on support for any non-capitalist (i.e., socialist) system.

“*Our national essence.*” The Japanese word for “national essence,” *kokutai*, took on highly charged overtones in the increasingly militaristic 1930s, carrying with it a sense of all that made Japan unique. It evoked similar emotions for prewar Japanese to those sparked by the national flag for many Americans.