

Japanese Buddhist Group Ending Close Ties With Political Party

By TAKASHI OKA Special to The New York Times

New York Times (1857-Current file); Dec 17, 1970; ProQuest Historical Newspapers The New York Times

pg. 2

Japanese Buddhist Group Ending Close Ties With Political Party

By TAKASHI OKA

Special to The New York Times

TOKYO, Dec. 16—"Religion is absolute," Hiroshi Hojo said. "But politics is relative. Therein lies the difference between the two."

Mr. Hojo, vice president of the neo-Buddhist organization known as Soka Gakkai, was explaining at an interview in the group's gleaming marble headquarters why it had decided to separate itself from its political offspring, the Komeito, or Clean Government party.

The two organizations wield tremendous power in Japan. Soka Gakkai, the lay organization of the Nichiren Shoshu Buddhist sect, reports a membership of 16 million and carries on a wide range of social, religious and cultural activities.

Komeito, founded only six years ago and benefiting from the active support of the tightly knit Soka Gakkai organization, has become the third strongest political party in Japan.

Mr. Hojo, a chunky, self-possessed former naval officer, was until June deputy chairman of the Komeito as well as vice president of the Soka Gakkai.

At the Komeito's eighth party convention, held that month, Mr. Hojo resigned his party post to concentrate exclusively on his duties with the religious organization. Several other party officials did the same, while others gave up their Soka Gakkai positions to serve solely as party officials. Yoshikatsu Takeiri, chairman

of the Komeito, formerly served concurrently as vice president of the Soka Gakkai.

Today, under its dynamic 42-year-old president, Daisaku Ikeda, the Soka Gakkai claims a membership of 7,500,000 "households." It counts its adherents on this basis, reporting as adherent households even those families in which only one member is a believer.

Meanwhile the Komeito, with 230,000 dues-paying members, has tried to build up political support among nonbelievers as well as the Soka Gakkai faithful. While holding no formal position in the Komeito, Mr. Ikeda is widely believed to remain its animating genius.

On Sunday, the Komeito launched its most recent venture, a national council to

work for normalized diplomatic relations between Japan and Communist China. The council is largely financed by the Komeito, but its charter membership of 210 includes well-known scholars, critics and artists covering the political spectrum from conservative to new left.

At the grass-roots level, according to the 39-year-old deputy secretary general, Ichiro Watanabe, the party is organizing clubs of supporters for individual legislators among such groups as shopkeepers, guilds and parent-teacher associations. The Komeito emphasizes youth—many of its legislators are aged in their thirties or early forties.

In recent years the Soka Gakkai and the Komeito have been spreading from large ur-

ban areas to smaller cities and towns and even into the countryside, the stronghold of easy-going conservative Buddhism.

But the main constituency, for both organizations, remains the urban dispossessed—people uprooted from their original homes in villages and living, often bewildered and lonely, in mammoth cities.

Many other Soka Gakkai adherents work in restaurants or bars, or Turkish baths, or other occupations often looked down upon. Many have suffered hardships or have gone through wrenching personal crises.

The fervor of the Soka Gak-

kai convert was transferred naturally and enthusiastically into the political field as support for the Komeito when the Soka Gakkai decided to establish a full-fledged political arm in 1964.

The party has obviously benefited from the tie. But of late both party and Soka Gakkai officials have been increasingly concerned with repudiating charges that they planned to impose a fascistic politico-religious regime on Japan, establishing Nichiren Shoshu as the state religion and putting the Komeito in charge of the government.