

**The New Human Revolution, Volume 7, Chapter 1, Parts 3–4**  
**‘The Flower of Culture’**  
**By HO GOKU**

**Shin’ichi Yamamoto’s emphasis on fostering members of the Education Department stems from his view that the true purpose of education is lost in postwar Japan. The rise of juvenile delinquency is but one symptom of this lack of respect for teachers and education, he says.**

In September 1961, the lapel pins for the Education Department were completed. Shin’ichi Yamamoto made time on numerous occasions to personally present the new pins, sharing with those members his great hopes for them and their activities.

On one such instance, he said: “I hope you will become a pivotal force in education and spread throughout society an understanding of the need for humanistic education. If each of you can gather a circle of 10 other teachers who, like you, care about the happiness of their students and are committed to practicing humanistic education, it will have a tremendous effect on education in this country, and Japan will definitely change as a result.

“This pin is a symbol of the honor and the responsibility of individuals who are committed to working tirelessly for the people, for society and for Buddhism.” His words resounded with his deepest hopes and prayer.

When Shin’ichi heard later from Education Department Chief Katsu Kiyohara that membership was increasing steadily, he said: “Each of our Education Department members is immensely capable. They each possess an incredibly important mission. Mr. Toda often used to say that in our attitude toward education, we should learn from the Jewish people, because they respect teachers and education so highly.

“A story I heard shows this high regard. One day a rabbi visited a certain town and asked the mayor to show him the town’s defenses. The mayor led the rabbi to the fort, where a platoon of soldiers was stationed.

“After reviewing the troops, the rabbi turned to the mayor and said: ‘I still haven’t seen this town’s defenses. It is not soldiers who defend a town, but teachers. Why didn’t you take me to the school?’

“He maintained that teachers are the heroes with whom rests the true defense of a land or nation. I agree completely. Teachers defend not only their nation but, in fact, the future of all humankind. For this reason, I ask that you do your best to raise the precious members of our Education Department with unstinting devotion and earnestness. Whatever you do for them, you are doing for society, for Japan and for the world. I am also planning to make education my life’s final undertaking.”

Shin’ichi was putting great effort into developing the Education Department because he had earnestly contemplated the country’s future and decided that education was the highest priority. At the time, juvenile delinquency had become a major social problem in Japan. It had reached a peak in 1951, then eased for a few years, but from 1955 it had begun to climb again. In 1961, some 950,000 minors were arrested by police, and the problem had become very serious.

From that time on, juvenile delinquency continued to soar. It was distinguished by a significant drop in the age of juvenile offenders, an increase in delinquency among children of middle-class families, and an upsurge in gang activity. In the past, the main factor behind most juvenile delinquency had been poverty. But by the late 1950s and early 1960s, Japanese society had already entered its period of rapid economic growth, and the standard of living had risen markedly. In spite of this, however, juvenile delinquency was on the

rise.

The government regularly talked about “producing educated citizens,” but when the Ministry of Education issued a white paper titled “Japanese Growth and Education,” it became eminently clear just what kind of “educated citizens” it had in mind. The report advocated the view that education was a highly effective form of investment in terms of its “contribution to economic growth.” In all fairness, the paper admitted that this was merely one perspective and also spoke of “the necessity [for Japan] to have a clear vision of the kind of people it hopes to foster in the future and to consider the mission of education from a broad viewpoint.” Yet it failed to elaborate any further on what that vision of future generations or education’s mission might be.

Though it may have been only one perspective, the report revealed the sad reality of a Japan that put increased productivity and economic growth before all else, completely losing sight of where its true priorities should lie. The Japanese education system failed to ask the fundamental questions as to the true purpose of education and learning; all that mattered was producing a capable workforce for Japan’s economic development. This, regrettably, was the state of the Japanese education system.

The great Greek philosopher Socrates said that it is not enough just to live but that we must live well. Japanese society, which had placed supreme value upon economic achievement, however, avoided this most crucial of all issues and turned a deaf ear to questions of purpose and meaning. This was the greatest failing of postwar Japan, hidden beneath its surface prosperity. Before World War II, the role of education had been to produce citizens who would be “useful to the State.” Though a democratic educational system had been instituted after the war, its main purpose soon became — as unintentionally revealed in the white paper — the production of citizens who could “contribute to the nation’s economic progress.”

Though the slogans may have changed, education was still designed to shape people to the needs of the state, whether military or economic. When education was viewed as no more than a means for assuring the prosperity of the nation, people, too, were simply reduced to a means to an end. No thought was given to what education meant to the children receiving it, and this very real flaw of Japan’s postwar educational system was intimately related to the growing problem of juvenile delinquency.

**To be continued**